

THE BUDDHA'S AUGUR: THE GUANYIN SPIRITUAL RESPONSE ORACLE

觀世音菩薩感應靈課英文版

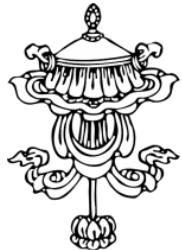
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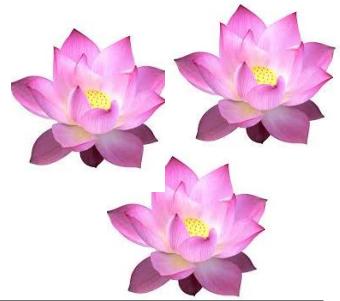
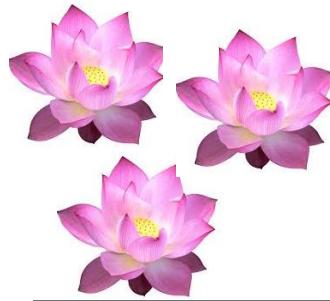
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Brian Chung

"Anywhere a Buddha goes—whether to a state, a city, or a hamlet — people will be converted and brought towards the Way.

All the lands beneath the stars will be serene and harmonious.

The Sun will shine bright and the Moon will be luminous.

Pleasant breezes and timely rains will be the norm.

Plagues, intrigues and calamities will not occur.

Society will be prosperous and peaceful.

Soldiers and arms will be of no use.

Virtue will be revered and humaneness cherished.

All will feel compelled to refine themselves with etiquette and deference.

Society will be free from thieves and bandits.

There will be neither grievances nor miscarriages of justice.

The powerful will not exploit the weak.

Everyone will naturally be satisfied and content."

-Infinite Life Sutra

DEDICATION OF MERIT

**May the merits and virtues accrued from this work
repay the kindness of my Mother, Father and Elders
and relieve them from their sufferings.**



**May my Mother, Father and Elders
bring forth the heart
of understanding and compassion and,
at the end of this life,**



be born together in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

*Only sincerity and deference can move Heaven and beget
responses*

-The Ancient Sages

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

According to the Buddha, our current era is the Dharma-ending age. A time where liberation is hard and wrong views prevail. In the past, Arhats and enlightened Sages were a common sight and people could consult one in person at anytime. However, times have changed and the karmic obstacles of people today render it hard to find and meet Sages. In fact, just as the Buddha warns in various sutras, demons masquerading as good knowing advisors now abound across the world. These deviant people spread wrong views, slander the Dharma and promote greed, lust, religious intolerance, killing and capricious behavior under the guise of faith, reason or freedom. Thus, we live in uncertain, afflicted and confusing times ; pitfalls and opportunities for sloth and apathy are everywhere. Moreover, due to our scant stocks of merit, impermanence and karmic retributions often strike without warning, robbing us of even the chance to live a short life of peace and happiness.

Furthermore, imperfection and scarcity also torments us. If we have one thing, we often lack another. Some may have wealth but no health while others may have beauty but not wealth.

Thus, the purpose of The Buddha's Augur: The Guanyin Spiritual Response Oracle is to serve as a reliable and straightforward beacon of light for individuals and families to rely on in these turbid times. This book is intended to stop people from foundering among karmic retributions caused by ignorance and help them finally take control of their own lives and futures.

Thus, this book not only contains a full translation of Patriarch Yin Guang's Guanyin Spiritual Response Oracle, but also includes important sections on how to eradicate karmic retributions, illnesses and dangers, cultivate virtue, achieve liberation, acquire right views and how to spiritually help the dead and dying. All of the Buddha and Sages' highest and most practical words of wisdom have been synthesized into this book, ensuring that it will be able to serve as a comprehensive guide to help readers navigate through life and make beneficial correct choices.

Anyone who cultivates in accordance with the Dharma found herein will certainly be able to rectify their karmas, achieve their dreams and attain Bodhi!

THE ORIGINS OF THE GUANYIN SPIRITUAL RESPONSE ORACLE

When the great Dharma Master Xuanzang embarked on his arduous pilgrimage to retrieve rare Buddhist texts and scriptures from India, he frequently consulted the Guanyin Spiritual Response Oracle. For he relied on it to gain insight into the fortunes and dangers he would meet during each new day.

In fact, it was Guanyin Bodhisattva who gave Xuanzang the dream that convinced him to begin the massive undertaking of retrieving and translating important Buddhist scriptures. To aid him, the Bodhisattva soon bestowed the Guanyin Spiritual Response Oracle onto him, along with instructions on how to use it.

At one point during his travels, he was almost killed and robbed by bandits, but he managed to escape unharmed because of this oracle. When he consulted it earlier that day, the Bodhisattva accurately warned him of the dangers he would face.

Therefore, we should not falsely consider this Dharma-door to be superstitious or against the Buddha's teachings. This method of divination is Guanyin Bodhisattva's gift to the world. As common people lack Dhyana Samadhi and transcendental powers, they are blind to the workings of their own karma. Driven by curiosity, many turn to fortune tellers or various methods of occult divination in order to know their future. This leads to various risks such as fraud, incorrect interpretations or possession by evil spirits and the like.

Therefore, out of compassion, Guanyin Bodhisattva bestowed the world with this oracle, so that everyone could benefit from his transcendental power of limitless foresight. Hence, whenever we are tormented by indecision, fears or dilemmas, we should consult this oracle. If we happen to receive an inauspicious lot, we must diligently recite Guanyin Bodhisattva's name. In Chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra, it is stated that such mindfulness can smash through lust, stupidity, dangers, karmic obstacles and all the causes and conditions of misfortune. Moreover, sincere recitation of his name will also allow merits to speedily accrue, thereby changing misfortune into fortune.

PATRIARCH YIN GUANG'S FOREWORD

The benevolence that Guanyin Bodhisattva harbors for all sentient beings is indescribably great. Not even Heaven and Earth's parental love for all beings can match even a fraction of the Bodhisattva's limitless benevolence.

To those with scant or unripe roots of virtue, the Bodhisattva will help them accrue merits and amass causes for future enlightenment. To those who are able to achieve liberation in their present life, the Bodhisattva will manifest and speak Dharma to them. Like the radiant sun illuminating the skies and all under it, sentient beings of myriads of different inclinations, forms, fortunes and faiths all receive the bounty of the Bodhisattva's eternal spring. Whenever sentient beings yearn, the Bodhisattva responds. The Bodhisattva has no intentions of his own ; his heart is at one with that of all sentient beings. Even if the entire Dharma Realm were to yearn for help, the entire Dharma Realm will receive it.

The Bodhisattva, responding to the wishes of the people, gifted the Guanyin Spiritual Response Oracle to the world. This wonderful Dharma-door simultaneously acts as a popular method of divination and as a way to accrue merits ; just like if a child refuses good medicine, the parents will naturally mix it with sweets to make it more palatable.

Moreover, Guanyin Bodhisattva's name is like the legendary hangonko incense—anyone who simply perceives it in anyway will not only have their pending evil karma eradicated, but will also have their merits manifest instantly. Besides, those who promote this text are benefiting both themselves and the public. Thus, Upasaka Xu Ji Yu and his wife deserve special mention, for they have printed thousands of copies of this text in order to create causes for future enlightenment among the public. They have turned the Dharma Wheel and carried out the will of the Bodhisattva.

Translator's Notes:

In the Buddha's Diamond Sutra, a famous gatha goes: "**The Buddhas' have no fixed Dharmas to speak ; all Dharma is Buddhadharma**" Hence, this is why the Buddha spoke 84,000 (innumerable) Dharma-doors for the benefit of all sentient beings. As, each sentient being has unique inclinations, goals, desires and habits, the Buddha speaks Dharma in accordance with these differing habits and wishes. Thus, the Guanyin Oracle is the Buddha's Dharma-door for those interested in divination.

PATRIARCH YIN GUANG'S INSTRUCTIONS FOR CONSULTING THE ORACLE

Guanyin Bodhisattva hears the suffering and sorrow of all sentient beings and sends relief in response. Those who seek the blessings of the Bodhisattva in order to do good will receive it—all their endeavors will be successful. However, those who ask the Bodhisattva to help them accomplish evil designs will instead have their plans thwarted. This is to protect them from rebirth in the realms of suffering, where escape is difficult. Moreover, the Bodhisattva is supremely compassionate and harbors only true benevolence. Thus, he wishes to use this Dharma-door of the Guanyin Oracle to remove the doubts that prevent people from accepting the Dharma.

To consult the oracle, do the following:

- 1.) Prepare five pennies and wash them with clean water. Afterwards, dry them with a clean towel. Arrange all five coins to face either obverse side up or reverse side up. Prepare five small pieces of red paper and stick all of them onto either the obverse or reverse side of each coin. All pieces of red paper must be on the same side of each coin. Trim off any excess paper so that the coins remain completely round.
- 2.) Use black ink to write the following Chinese characters onto the red paper (one character per coin):

金 木 水 火 土

Metal Wood Water Fire Earth

- 3.) If you already have an image of Guanyin Bodhisattva, you should bow before it and reverently light good incense as an offering (if you do not have such an image or shrine, you can print out the image on page 12). Alternatively, you can bow before a printed copy of this book and reverently light good incense in front of it.
- 4.) Take the five coins and circle them over the burning incense for three times. Afterwards, sincerely contemplate your question or dilemma in your mind.
- 5.) Once you have earnestly contemplated your question, you should sincerely recite Namo Guan Shi Yin Pusa for 1000 times or more.**

6.) Shake the coins in your hands to scramble them. Afterwards, toss them into the air and allow them to fall onto a hard surface.

7.) Select the matching lot based on the combination of the coins (see the List of Lots). For instance, if the coins show:

金 〇 〇 火 土

Then the answer to your question is Lot 22.

Important Notes:

The reason that you need to recite the name of the Bodhisattva for at least a thousand times is because doing so proves your sincerity, and only sincerity can generate the purity of heart needed to beget an accurate response. Just like you cannot see your own reflection in volatile water, you cannot consult the Bodhisattva with a turbid mind. Furthermore, recitation also generates ample stocks of merit.

Furthermore, according to the Ven. Master Chin Kung, one thousand is a special number. For instance, if you sincerely read and recite any sutra for a thousand times, you will be able to acquire the foundational tranquility of heart necessary to attain sudden liberation. Afterwards, it is very likely that you will attain profound insight during your regular sutra recitations or when a seemingly random trigger event occurs.

Lastly, many of the lots that make up the Guanyin Oracle indicate forthcoming rank and wealth. Rank and wealth naturally follow those who have done virtue. However, the Sages have said that: The petty and base are often wealthy ; the Sagely and kind live simple lives and are often devoid of wealth.

This is because the Sagely and kind voluntarily lead simple lives and give away any excess wealth to the needy. Moreover, they also decline to seek power. As the Buddha has said that wealth, lust, prestige, food and excessive sleep are the 5 roots of hellish rebirth, it is not hard to understand why the wise reject wealth and power while the greedy and petty exhaust their stocks of merit to seek it. Thus, if you manage to draw a good lot, the best course of action would be to let others enjoy your good fortune (i.e. charity) and continue to live simply yourself.

南無大慈大悲觀世音菩薩



Countenance as exalted as Tyrian purple and appearance as splendid as the finest gold ; adorned by hundreds of thousands of millions of divine lilies.

Robed in majestic white and complete with the thirty-two features of eminence.

Perfectly enlightened and dwelling easefully in Non-abidance.

Praised in unison by the wondrous universe as the Lord Paramount of Compassion.

*Namo Greatly Compassionate, Greatly Benevolent, Spiritually Responsive, Guan
Shi Yin Bodhisattva Mahasattva.*

LIST OF LOTS

金	木	水	火	土	LOT 1	15
金	0	0	0	0	LOT 2	16
0	木	0	0	0	LOT 3	17
0	0	水	0	0	LOT 4	18
0	0	0	火	0	LOT 5	19
0	0	0	0	土	LOT 6	20
金	木	0	0	0	LOT 7	21
金	0	水	0	0	LOT 8	22
金	0	0	火	0	LOT 9	23
金	0	0	0	土	LOT 10	24
0	木	水	0	0	LOT 11	25
0	木	0	火	0	LOT 12	26
0	木	0	0	土	LOT 13	27
0	0	水	火	0	LOT 14	28
0	0	水	0	土	LOT 15	29
0	0	0	火	土	LOT 16	30
金	木	水	0	0	LOT 17	31
金	木	0	0	土	LOT 18	32

金	0	水	火	0	LOT 19	33
金	0	水	0	土	LOT 20	34
0	木	水	火	0	LOT 21	35
金	0	0	火	土	LOT 22	36
0	木	水	0	土	LOT 23	37
0	木	0	火	土	LOT 24	38
0	0	水	火	土	LOT 25	39
金	木	0	火	0	LOT 26	40
0	木	水	火	土	LOT 27	41
金	木	0	火	土	LOT 28	42
金	木	水	火	0	LOT 29	43
金	0	水	火	土	LOT 30	44
金	木	水	0	土	LOT 31	45
0	0	0	0	0	LOT 32	46

LOT DETAILS

Lot 1: The Lot of New Heights (Extreme Auspiciousness)

金 木 水 火 土

彩鳳臨丹闕。靈龜降吉祥。禍除福祿至。喜氣自洋洋。

The prosperous phoenix mends every weakness ; the sacred tortoise bestows fortune and auspiciousness. Misfortunes are replaced by providence, and the air is filled with cause for celebration and revelry.

Meaning:

The Lot of New Heights indicates honor, prosperity and cause for celebration. Moreover, it indicates that legal problems, lawsuits and conflicts will not happen ; any existing ones will be resolved favorably. The ill and bedridden will leave their sickbeds and be restored to health. Furthermore, you will become a honorable pillar of society. Those who are far away from home will return and reunite with their families. Misfortunes are eradicated and disasters dissipate ; bliss and inner peace will materialize imminently. In short, this lot represents celebration, wisdom, providence and honor.

Translators Notes:

Even though this lot gives you the right to enjoy yourself, you must still guard against hedonism and complacency. According to the Treatise of Response and Retribution, excess revelry, drunkenness, idleness and greed for meat dishes are all karmic transgressions. The treatise also states that sinners will have their lifespan shortened by periods of either 12 years (for serious offenses) or 100 days ; misfortunes, illnesses and so forth will also be meted out as punishments. Thus, it would be wise to handle good fortune with modesty and reasonable restraint.

Lot 2: The Lot of Positive Change (Extreme Auspiciousness)

金 O O O O

舊跡宜更改。新事好進程。龍門魚化躍。凡骨作神靈。

**The stagnant will be reformed and new undertakings will progress unhindered.
Fish will soar through the Dragon Gate and common men will become gods.**

Meaning:

This Lot of Positive Change indicates increased income. As you will lack neither peace nor material security, now is a good time to amass merits and cultivate virtue. The sick and infirm will completely recover and leave their sickbeds. Everything will proceed in accordance with virtue and reason. Moreover, those who have travelled away from home will return to do profound and beneficial things. There will be no shortage of the necessities of life. Just like all flowers bloom during spring, even if a hundred virtuous undertakings are simultaneously carried out, no obstacles will be met and success is assured.

Translator's Notes:

The phrase "common men will become gods" can also refer to spiritual attainments. For instance, the Buddha has said that those who make light offerings can achieve profound wisdom and the innate ability to discern between good and evil.

Lot 3: The Lot of Eventual Realization (Moderate Auspiciousness)

○ 木 ○ ○ ○

動用因風便。求財可托人。喜逢戊己曰。干事得完成。

Observe the wind before setting sail ; finances will improve if carefully entrusted to someone else. Happiness and providence will arrive eventually.

Meaning:

The Lot of Eventual Realization indicates that material security will become possible after careful planning and due diligence. The sick will take longer to recover and travelers will meet delays. Moreover, business and legal affairs may not proceed in accordance with reason. Aspirations will not be realized ; expectations may not be met.

However, when the time is right, much needed rain will fall and divine providence will manifest. In short, stagnation will occur before peace and comfort.

Translator's Notes:

If you draw this lot, it is recommended that you become vegan or vegetarian. The merits derived from respecting life are very powerful, thus, they can rapidly augment your stock of merits and speedily neutralize illnesses or other troubles.

Lot 4: The Lot of Smooth Sailing (Moderate-High Auspiciousness)

○ ○ 水 ○ ○

船泛江湖內。難求獲寶多。更宜進大用。福至禍災除。

A ship anchored in a river or lake cannot access the treasures of the deep blue sea. Use your wealth on charity and noble causes. Nevertheless, providence will be bestowed and misfortunes withdrawn.

Meaning:

This lot indicates that anxieties will suddenly go away. While most lofty expectations will not be met, progress towards health and lasting comfort will occur. Happiness will be obtained by seeking the company of the wise and sagely. Just like receding rain clouds reveal clear skies and skeletal trees bloom upon the arrival of spring, modest and lasting comfort will be bestowed.

Translator's Notes:

While grand ambitions may not be reached, comfort and happiness will certainly be obtained. Thus, resources should not be squandered on vain attempts to gain love and glory, but should instead be used on amassing merits through good deeds.

Lot 5: The Lot of Flames (Moderate Auspiciousness)

○ ○ ○ 火 ○

凶卦按南方。烈火不可擋。爭訟文書滯。時間有小殃。

Fierce misfortune presses from the south ; infernos cannot be blocked. Legal proceedings will meet obstacles and time has small calamities in store.

Meaning:

The Lot of Flames indicates fear and indecision. Initiating new projects, moving or expansion will result in defeat and retreat. The best course of action is to be conservative and maintain the status quo. **Wait and endure for now—providence will naturally manifest when the time is right.**

Furthermore, as demons and karmic creditors (the agents of misfortune) are attracted to meat and the impure aura that surrounds meat eaters, it would be wise to immediately adopt a vegan or vegetarian diet.

Translator's Notes:

In the Earth Store Sutra, it is recommended that people keep an image of Earth Store Bodhisattva in a pure area in the southern part of their dwellings. If they do so and burn incense as offerings, they will reap great fortune, prolong the lifespan of their family members and eradicate evil karma. Thus, if you draw this lot, it is highly recommended that you heed this instruction. As the southern side is where the spirits of your karmic creditors linger, having a shrine to Earth Store Bodhisattva there will help ward off evil karma and settle karmic debts.

Lot 6: The Lot of Harvest (Moderate Auspiciousness)

○ ○ ○ ○ 土

戊己本居中。先憂後喜逢。夫子值陳厄。目下不和通。

Anxieties will come first but good fortune will follow. As misfortunes are either looming or present, you must act with modesty and caution.

Meaning:

The Lot of Harvest means that obstacles presently impede your progress. Thus, do not wait until your coffers are broken, you must voluntarily spend amassed wealth on charity. Travelers and expatriates will remain away from home and the sick will find full recovery difficult to achieve. Whatever that is sought after will not be achieved. The time is simply not right. Thus, focus on being cautious of present danger or difficulty.

However, once this difficult period passes, an eternal harvest will dawn upon you, making misery a thing of the past.

Furthermore, in order to lessen or eliminate present difficulties, you should refrain from eating meat or slaughtering animals. Such abstinence will not only prevent evil stars and karmic creditors from approaching you, it will also speed up and multiply your pending good fortune.

Lot 7: The Lot of Extensive Progress (Extreme Auspiciousness)

金 木 O O O

門戶興安泰。錢財漸漸昌。進身求望吉。疾病得安康。

Prosperity and peace will dawn upon your household. Material security and virtuous aspirations will be realized. Even if diseases and illnesses are met, they will prove harmless.

Meaning:

The Lot of Extensive Progress indicates lasting material security. Those travelling abroad will find treasures and success. Moreover, diseases and illnesses will do no harm. Legal proceedings or negotiations will play out in accordance with fairness and reason. This lot is also auspicious for marriages. Lastly, as such good fortune is due to your past good deeds, you must continue to replenish your stocks of merit by supporting Buddhist teachings and adopting a vegetarian or vegan diet.

Lot 8: The Lot of Great Assistance (Extreme Auspiciousness)

金 O 水 O O

所幹蒙天祐。門招百福臻。貴人相助力。獲福盡歡欣。

Your virtuous endeavors will be blessed by Heaven ; myriads of auspicious events will find their way to your door. Moreover, assistance from friends and allies will arrive. You will harvest great fortune.

Meaning:

Just like burning good incense will attract blessings from auspicious gods, the Lot of Great Assistance indicates that friends and allies will offer important assistance in secret. As you will soon become a pillar of your community, you must work tirelessly to help the underprivileged, poor and needy. Those travelling will find material security and receive profound wisdom. Moreover, your family and descendants will all be united in joy and happiness.

As profound wisdom is the reward of having propagated the Dharma in lives past, you must diligently spread any profound and virtuous teachings you encounter to the public.

Lot 9: The Lot of Coming Peace (Moderate-High Auspiciousness)

金 〇 〇 火 〇

目下如冬樹。枯衰未放花。看看春色動。一發盡生芽。

The view outside consists of trees made barren by winter. However, upon the arrival of spring, fresh leaves will begin to sprout.

Meaning:

The Lot of Coming Peace indicates hesitation. **Anxieties will come first but happiness and peace are guaranteed to follow.** Travelers and expatriates will return clad in brocade robes. However, illnesses are chronic and recovery will be sluggish. Nevertheless, marriages will be harmonious and glorious. Official business or legal proceedings will be mixed. On the other hand, relationships with most people will be agreeable.

As ill health, legal quarrels and anxieties are caused by the habit of eating meat and slaughtering animals, you should purify your karmic situation by becoming vegan and liberating life.

Lot 10: The Lot of Materializing Dreams (Extreme Auspiciousness)

金 O O O 土

春日融和氣。衰殘物再興。更逢微細雨。德澤又還生。

Springtime will be graced with harmonious ambiance ; rebirth and revival will replace decline and injury. Moreover, a subtle and discerning rain will fall, completely replenishing the lake of merit.

Meaning:

This lot indicates great providence. Travelers and expatriates will return home clad in glory. Marriages and mergers will go smoothly. Furthermore, arguments and scandals will cease immediately. There will be an increase in social status and income. Moreover, If good deeds are done with diligence, inexhaustible bliss will materialize in the next life.

Translator's Notes:

If you receive this lot, you must follow the last line and diligently use your uniquely good fortune to do good deeds. This lot represents an exceptional opportunity to multiply one's stock of merits and gain unrivaled future rebirths.

Lot 11: The Lot of a Hundred Successes (Extreme Auspiciousness)

○ 木 水 ○ ○

災散禍門閉。喜慶福門開。目前相逢處。須當得橫財。

Disasters are dispelled and misfortunes are kept at bay ; joy, celebration and good fortune gush in through the front door. Windfalls will be encountered.

Meaning:

The Lot of a Hundred Successes indicates that you are favored by superiors and admired by subordinates. Happiness occurs naturally and anxieties become non-existent. Respectability and material necessities will come on demand. Like a deprived seedling suddenly bestowed with ample rainwater, divine providence arrives as rapidly as a boat sailing downstream amid favorable winds. Moreover, life will be peaceful and devoid of harm.

Translator's Notes:

As this is a highly auspicious lot, you must not forget to diligently do good deeds if you draw this one. Only by continuously planting merits will your good fortune last across lifetimes.

Lot 12: The Lot of Peace and Prosperity (Extreme Auspiciousness)

○ 木 ○ 火 ○

進用多隨意。寒儒衣錦歸。前程春風霽。散步賞芳菲。

Advancement occurs naturally and in accordance with one's expectations. The prestigious symbols of office are finally bestowed. The future is as pleasant as a delightful spring breeze. Strolling easefully in the garden, one admires the fragrant blossoms.

Meaning:

The Lot of Peace and Prosperity indicates blessed advancement. Positions of regional or national importance will be bestowed upon you. Moreover, friends and allies, all harboring high hopes for you, will support your many initiatives to benefit the public and promote mercy. You will soon become an exalted pillar of society. Moreover, there will soon be excess wealth to practice generosity with. You will shine like the gleaming august moon that illuminates the entire universe.

Translator's Notes:

According to the Treatise on Response and Retribution, the virtuous become cautious when they receive favor. As this lot indicates that you will soon become the favorite son and see a large elevation in your status, you must never betray the public trust. With deference and virtue, you can rise to Buddhahood. However, if you abuse your position, then remember that the higher you rise the harder you fall.

Lot 13: The Lot of Strenuousness (Extreme Inauspiciousness)

○ 木 ○ ○ 土

水中現明月。見影不見形。錢財多失散。謹慎得安寧。

The water harbors a reflection of the gleaming moon, but only a vague silhouette could be seen. Wealth is lost and scattered. Peace and comfort can only be obtained through care and caution.

Meaning:

The Lot of Strenuousness indicates that plans and initiatives will meet failure and sighs. Wealth will be scattered and assets lost. Moreover, you will experience social setbacks and relationships will be spoiled. You will have to contend against the sly and petty. Thus, the best course of action is to be conservative and cautiously guard your current position. Your time will eventually come. Nevertheless, in order to secure prosperity and happiness, you must diligently offer incense to images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Translator's Notes:

While this lot is indeed very unfavorable, it also reveals a potent remedy. According to the Earth Store Sutra:

“Moreover, Earth Store, in the future, good men or women, upon encountering images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, or Wheel-Turning Kings, may give gifts or make offerings to them. Such persons will obtain limitless blessings and will always enjoy supremely wonderful bliss among people and gods. If they can dedicate that merit to the Dharma Realm, their blessings and benefits will be beyond compare.”

Thus, any one who receives this lot should diligently change his fate by making sincere offerings of light, flowers, incense, fruits, vegan foods, valuables, pure water and or canopies to images or statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Lot 14: The Lot of Peace and Quiet (Moderate Auspiciousness)

○ ○ 水 火 ○

動用不安寧。經營事不成。退身方可吉。守分禍潛形。

Initiatives will lead to disturbances ; business affairs will not be successful. However, by withdrawing, fortune can be obtained. Maintain the status quo and misfortunes will remain dormant.

Meaning:

The Lot of Peace and Quiet indicates that you should maintain the status quo and act conservatively. Remain modest and avoid showing off. Caution and frugality will lead to peace and harmony. You must put aside ambitions and remain in your current station ; simply go with the flow. Furthermore, any effort to amass great wealth will be in vain. In order to neutralize disasters and misfortunes, it is imperative to regularly recite Namo Amita Buddha.

Translator's Notes:

In the Contemplation Sutra, it is mentioned that eight billion eons worth of heavy evil karma is eradicated by each single utterance of Namo Amita Buddha. Hence, there is no better way to rectify our karmic situation than through sincere and habitual mindfulness of Amita Buddha's name.

Lot 15: The Lot of Obstacles (Extreme Inauspiciousness)

○ ○ 水 ○ 土

衰木逢春少。孤舟遇大風。動身無所托。百事不亨通。

The tree withers and spring disappoints. Like a lone boat blown around by fierce winds, no opportunities exist and nothing done meets success.

Meaning:

The Lot of Obstacles indicates that the avenues to wealth and prestige are blocked. Aspirations will not be realized. The only course of action is to be content with current position. If you entertain anxieties, things will only get worse. Increases in rank or wealth will not happen ; prized steeds or luxurious fur become distant dreams. Therefore, you must live a life of simplicity and refrain from seeking forcefully. Furthermore, pray to Heaven and ask the Guanyin Bodhisattva for providence ; regularly recite his name and quietly do good deeds within your power.

Translator's Notes:

According to Lord Superior Wen Chang's Tract of the Quiet Way, good deeds done anonymously or with a low profile brings multitudes of blessings and speedily eradicates past sins. Thus, if you draw this lot, you should keep a low profile and diligently cultivate mindfulness and virtue without boasting or demanding recognition.

Lot 16: The Lot of the Rising Sun (Extreme Auspiciousness)

○ ○ ○ 火 土

日出照四海。光輝天下明。進身和合吉。百事自然成。

The rising sun shines brightly across the Four Seas. Its glorious light illuminates everything under the skies. Advancing harmoniously under auspicious conditions, success occurs naturally for all things.

Meaning:

The Lot of the Rising Sun indicates the absence of discord. Thus, peace and auspiciousness naturally pervades. Be bold and advance forward to deserved success. Travelers and expatriates will meet no hindrances. Legal proceedings will play out in accordance with fairness and reason. Moreover, this lot also indicates material security and blessings. You will also bask in esteem and bliss. By reading sutras and reciting Amita Buddha, lasting peace and prosperity will be ensured.

Lot 17: The Lot of Pending Merriment (Moderate-High Auspiciousness)

金 木 水 O O

病散身安泰。官事只可和。前程宜守舊。災禍自消磨。

Diseases and illnesses are dispersed ; tranquility and health are bestowed. Lawsuits will be resolved. For now, maintain current position. Calamities and misfortunes will wither away by themselves.

Meaning:

The Lot of Merriment indicates bittersweet good fortune. Everything will turn out alright. However, lie low and do not contend or protest. By exercising forbearance and patience, calamities and misfortunes can be eradicated. Right now, the virtuous and upright are weak while the petty revel in their arrogance and shrewdness. Just like flora must endure winter before spring allows them to exude their fragrances, you must hide in your flower bud and wait for the wicked to fall on their own. Afterwards, you will bloom.

Translator's Notes:

The most important advice here is patience. Even if the abuses or behavior you see make your blood boil, you must still exercise forbearance. Nothing burns through karmic obstacles like the virtue of patience and forbearance. If you decide to fight and protest, you will only be swapping blessings for evil karma. Quietly build up your virtues and eventually, the wicked will have nothing but karmic retributions while you will be flush with merit.

Lot 18: The Lot of Indecision (Extreme Inauspiciousness)

金 木 〇 〇 土

此卦恍惚多。財帛暗消磨。婚姻反成害。人事不諧和。

There is much absent-mindedness. Wealth slips away and marriages become harmful. Social relations are not harmonious.

Meaning:

The Lot of Indecision indicates the lack of success for all matters. Business and commerce will cause worry. Those you have shown great kindness to may repay your benevolence with cruelty. You must guard against hostilities initiated by petty people. Furthermore, speak with great caution in order to avoid arguments and contention. Do not be greedy for fame and profit as both are unattainable. However, just like how autumn ends the storms of summer and gives rise to the clear luminous moon, patience will eventually yield for you peace and comfort.

Until then, cultivate virtue, speak kindly and practice veganism. The resulting merits will keep you safe.

Lot 19: The Lot of Good Harvest (Extreme Auspiciousness)

金 ○ 水 火 ○

豐富時時進。錢財格格高。松筠欺雪露。蘭檜出蓬蒿。

Abundance and prosperity becomes the norm. Your good fortune is as majestic as a tall pine tree adorned with white snow and as unique as a radiant blue flower among bland vegetation.

Meaning:

The Lot of Good Harvest indicates that the Three Gods of Auspiciousness will bestow blessings. Plentiful years, material abundance and a prosperous family is your lot. New heights will be reached and expectations exceeded. Travelers will reach their destinations unhindered. The sick will recover even without medical assistance. Scandals and arguments will sink away and disappear. If you can tirelessly recite Namo Amita Buddha, you will rise to a lofty state.

Lot 20: The Lot of Attaining Prosperity (Extreme Auspiciousness)

金 O 水 O 土

高明居祿位。籠禽得放生。動容招財寶。更宜向遠行。

You are wise and deserving of wealth and rank. Like a soaring dragon, be proactive and you will find treasures. Travel far and seek progress.

Meaning:

This lot represents that the time for advancement has arrived. Do not procrastinate or hold onto the status quo. Your destiny demands that you do great things for the benefit of the public and the underprivileged. Moreover, by making long journeys to see wise men and true Sages, happiness will be obtained. Resources will come on demand and the amount will be in accordance with your expectations. Furthermore, do not let paranoia or a tendency towards being suspicious hold you back. Thank Heaven, thank Earth and thank the gods. Show your gratitude for blessings bestowed by burning fine incense and offering lights.

Lot 21: The Lot of Prosperity & Fortune (Extreme Auspiciousness)

○ 木 水 火 ○

福祿得安強。聲名自進昌。遂心獲大吉。萬里好風光。

Providence and blessings materialize unhindered. Your reputation advances and great bliss arises on demand. Even if you travel for tens of thousands of miles, your esteem and virtuous repute would still precede you.

Meaning:

The Lot of Prosperity & Fortune indicates advancement and promotion. Misfortunes retreat and give way to boundless providence and blessings. Unbridled happiness will be attainable. You will soon hold the public trust and become a pillar of the community. Moreover, all of your virtuous desires will be within reach. Travelers and expatriates will return home clad in success. Of the thirty-two lots, this one is the best.

Translator's Notes:

This lot is considered the best of the best. Hence, if you receive this lot, you must work hard to progress yourself spiritually. By amassing merits while enjoying the pinnacle of success, untold heights can be reached. As you are esteemed by the public, the most effective way for you to gather merits would be to spread rare and exalted Buddhist teachings such as the Dharma-door of Amitabha.

Lot 22: The Lot of Clarity (Extreme Auspiciousness)

金 ○ 火 土

明月正當天。清光午夜圓。纖毫雲翳息。萬里得凝然。

The luminous moon shines prominently in the sky ; its clear light forms a gleaming circle in the darkness. As the skies are clear for thousands of miles, no clouds obstruct the moon's elegant and velvety form.

Meaning:

The Lot of Clarity indicates that while the past may have been dark, the future is bright. There is good wealth luck and business activities will yield profit. In short, it will be smooth sailing from now on. Furthermore, lawsuits, legal proceedings and verbal conflicts will scatter and disappear. The sick will gradually return to health and all family members will be safe, prosperous and happy. Lastly, purple smoke will arise from your incense burners (i.e. heavenly blessings).

As all good fortune is the result of past merits, you must increase your charitable contributions now that you have the ability to do so.

Lot 23: The Lot of Delays and Barriers (Extreme Inauspiciousness)

○ 木 水 ○ 土

羸馬登途遠。饑人去路長。進身皆不吉。凡事可消詳。

**Like a lean horse on a long journey, a hungry man cannot travel far.
Advancement is not auspicious and endeavors will face delays.**

Meaning:

This lot represents obstructions and hindrances. Everything you do will encounter delays. Neither journey afar nor leave your hometown. Your desires for wealth will not be fulfilled. Furthermore, arguments will escalate into legal proceedings and lawsuits. Take precautions against illnesses and threats to your health. You must sincerely make offerings of light, incense or flowers to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in order to obtain peace and dispel misfortunes.

Lot 24: The Lot of Glory (Extreme Auspiciousness)

○ 木 ○ 火 土

三家俱養性。始元得共生。果隨心造化。萬事自然成。

The three houses cultivate virtue in unison ; all peacefully coexist. Fruits ripen on demand and there will not be even one failure among ten thousand successes.

Meaning:

The Lot of Glory indicates prestige. As you have the ability to be a virtuous official or executive, you should accept appointments when they are inevitably offered to you. However, keep a low profile before you are appointed. Aspirations will be realized and expectations met. Furthermore, everything you do will be successful. The sick will speedily and fully recover. If there are legal proceedings, they will cause neither anxieties nor doubts. Needless to say, you will never lack the necessities of life. As you are now flush with divine providence, do not forget to live frugally and donate regularly to charity. Good deeds will bring about lasting prosperity.

Lot 25: The Lot of Dense Blessings (Extreme Auspiciousness)

○ ○ 水 火 土

離別重相見。不知事盡通。所求皆隨意。身樂得從容。

You will be happily reunited with those dear to you. The unknown will become known. Whatever you wish for will be attained. Leisurely bliss is your lot.

Meaning:

The Lot of Dense Blessings indicates extreme good fortune and the lack of anxieties. You will enjoy peace, bliss, harmony, delight and leisure. Trade, business and investments will go smoothly. Scandals and verbal conflicts will disappear. Moreover, those who have been separated for extensive periods of time will happily reunite. Lastly, you should use your newfound blessings to help the less fortunate and reunite the separated.

Lot 26: The Lot of Lasting Success (Extreme Auspiciousness)

金 木 〇 火 〇

年來少災害。先祖積陰鷙。若言幹辦事。皇天相助力。

Misfortunes are few and sparse. As your forefathers have accumulated yin virtue, the Jade Emperor will bless all your endeavors.

Meaning:

The Lot of Lasting Success indicates complete success in all matters. Boundless happiness and bliss will be enjoyed by your household. Advance forward with virtuous intentions. Travelers will soon reach their destinations ; those who you wish to meet or reunite with will soon visit you. Furthermore, scandals and arguments will be eradicated. Misfortunes disappear ; lasting providence materializes.

Translator's Notes:

"Yin virtue" refers to good deeds done selflessly and without desire for quid pro quo, loyalty or fame. In Lord Superior Wen Chang's Tract of the Quiet Way, it is mentioned that if your ancestors had accumulated yin virtue, you will enjoy their surplus merits. Hence, if you receive this lot, you must work hard to repay the kindness of your ancestors by diligently doing good deeds and encouraging others to do good. Moreover, you must impart the wisdom of the Sages to your children so that they will grow up to be good men and women. Lastly, in order to end the repetitive cycle of killing and vengeance that results from eating meat, you must become vegetarian or vegan.

Lot 27: The Lot of Cornucopia (Extreme Auspiciousness)

○ 木 水 火 土

霖雨禾苗潤。何愁不廣收。隨心得所以。無喜亦無憂。

Timely rains nourish the crops ; a bountiful harvest is assured. Whatever that is wished for will naturally be attained. Thus, maintain a heart of equanimity

Meaning:

The effect of this lot is like how spring causes withered flora to bloom and how timely rains restore skeletal branches to lushness. The nine types of unnatural deaths and every kind of misfortune will never happen. All scandals and causes for misery will exit your life. Moreover, unbridled bliss and esteem will fall onto your lap. Accomplishment, blessings and providence will accompany your every virtuous endeavor.

Translators Notes:

The nine types of unnatural deaths refers to:

- 1) Death by illnesses through either lack of care or lack of successful cure.
- 2) Death at the hands of the legal system.
- 3) Death after being robbed of life essence by evil spirits.
- 4.)Death by fire.
- 5.)Death by drowning.
- 6.)Death caused by being killed by wild beasts.
- 7.)Death caused by falling from heights.
- 8.)Death by poison or evil incantations.
- 9.)Death by starvation.

Furthermore, as long life and good health are the fruits of life liberation and vegetarianism, you should diligently amass more merit in these areas in order to multiply and prolong your blessings.

Lot 28: The Lot of Development (Extreme Auspiciousness)

金 木 〇 火 土

蚌中珠自現。石內玉爭妍。進身求望吉。凡庶作神仙。

The mussels reveal their precious pearls and the majestic jade concealed within stone finally sees the light of day. It is an auspicious time for you to advance and pursue your dreams. Moreover, mere mortals can now become Immortal Sages.

Meaning:

The Lot of Development indicates that you have enough merits to reach the lofty heights of great prominence. Coronets, purple robes and ivory batons—the symbols of ministerial office—will be bestowed upon you. As long as your policies represent mercy and humane kindness, you to be loved and esteemed by all. Furthermore, the sick will recover quickly and the necessities of life will be plentiful. If you can diligently rectify your heart and sincerely recite Namo Amita Buddha, you will be able to eradicate all doubts and make great spiritual progress.

Lot 29: The Lot of Heavenly Blessings (Extreme Auspiciousness)

金 木 水 火 ○

征戰逢威力。旌旗引駕歸。功成名位就。門戶見光輝。

Righteous struggle will be reinforced with power and strength. You will return in triumph as your banners flap victoriously in the air. Exaltation and renown will be achieved. Your household and family name will be adorned with glory.

Meaning:

The Lot of Heavenly Blessings indicates great providence. Because of your merits, heavenly blessings will be bestowed upon you. Moreover, you will receive assistance from friends and allies. Your will enjoy unmatched esteem and public adoration. Furthermore, misfortunes and the like will be completely eradicated. You will live in leisurely peace and your heart will be filled with bliss. As your coffers will soon be overflowing with gold and jade, you must repay Heaven's kindness by diligently practicing generosity and charity.

Lot 30: The Lot of Later Bliss (Moderate-High Auspiciousness)

金 O 水 火 土

離水得到岸。過橋獲度安。重重憂險阻。蕩蕩自心寬。

Leaving the water, you come ashore. Like a man crossing the bridge to safety, the various anxieties that have plagued you will eventually be replaced by leisure and happiness.

Meaning:

The Lot of Later Bliss indicates that your heart is currently gripped by anxieties. What you seek will not come easily and lofty aspirations for wealth and power will not materialize. Even though you now feel obstructed by various hindrances, you will gradually see an increase in your fortunes. Soon, the signs of divine providence will become clearly visible.

Translator's Notes:

As fortune can be changed by cultivating virtue, forbearance and charity, you should diligently do so. The resulting good karma will help reduce the wait time, speedily melt through karmic obstacles and augment your stocks of merit.

Lot 31: The Lot of Setbacks (Extreme Inauspiciousness)

金 木 水 〇 土

迢迢途路遠。看看日墜山。憂心無可託。所作事艱難。

**The road is long and arduous ; the sun disappears behind the mountains.
Anxious and without hope, whatever you do will encounter difficulty.**

Meaning:

This lot indicates setbacks and delays, akin to a carriage mired in the mud. Like a long arduous journey to a far flung destination, the sun sets before you could arrive. There is no hope, no relief and no assistance. Furthermore, little help from acquaintances will be forthcoming and efforts to gain wealth will be in vain. The best course of action is to rectify your karmic situation by sincerely reciting Namo Amita Buddha. Heaven is merciful and will protect those who sincerely embark upon the path of virtue.

Lot 32: The Lot of Extinction (Extreme Inauspiciousness)

O O O O O

塵暗秦時鏡。珉含卞氏瓊。如屈石窟內。何日見光明。

Thick dust deprives the mirror of fortune of its shimmer. Priceless jade was once dull stone. You are like a gem in the rough, when will you decide to shine?

Meaning:

The Lot of Extinction indicates doubts and anxieties. Arguments, scandals, illnesses and misfortunes may appear. Your aspirations will not be attained ; your expectations will not be met. Thus, you must be conservative, live simply and maintain the status quo. Furthermore, you must hereafter do good deeds and study the sutras. By doing so, you are polishing your karmic slate and changing your fortune for the better.

Translator's Notes:

According to Venerable Hsuan Hua, those who **regularly make offerings to and bow before an image of Earth Store Bodhisattva** will enjoy numerous benefits. One of them is that all their dreams will come true:

"Fifth, they will easily obtain what they want... Those in the present may enjoy benefits and longer lives, but that is other people. I do not gain anything by it. Now here is something that is good for you. Your wishes come true. For example, one thing that most people think is most critical may be a man or a woman's hope for a good spouse. He or she will get their wish. This is an issue for laypeople. What about monastics? They will be good monks and nuns, getting their wish. If you say, "I'm not interested in any of these." Find something that interests you and the related wishes will come true."

- Ven. Master Hsuan Hua's Commentary on the Earth Store Sutra (Chp.11)

Thus, even though this lot is perhaps the worst, hope is still right around the corner. Diligently do as the sutras instruct and your fortune will change in a blink of an eye.

THE WORKINGS OF KARMA AND FATE

The following is an important excerpt on the workings of karma from Venerable Master Chin Kung's commentary on Liao Fan's Four Lessons (a real life account of a man who changed his fate through good deeds):

Master Yun-Gu completely accepted the concept of predestination. However, we can change our own destiny and thus we create it. Buddhism is not about predestination. It is about recreating destiny. But, we can only depend on ourselves to do this, to become awakened. Nobody else can change our destiny for us.

"Destiny is created by ourselves," and "We seek our own good fortune". Since Mr. Liao-Fan was an intellectual, he knew much about the teachings of Confucius and so the master cited principles from the Book of Songs and the Book of History to enlighten him. Master Yun-Gu understood these teachings and confirmed them to be important and true.

In the Buddhist teachings, it is written that if we wish for and seek wealth, position, a son, a daughter, long life, we can attain them. Since lying is one of the greatest offenses in the Buddha's teachings, we can be assured that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have no reason to deceive us.

In Buddhism, it said that, "In seeking wealth, one will attain wealth. In seeking children, one will attain children". Even if we were not meant to have any children in this life, upon practicing good deeds we can have a child. "In seeking long life, one will attain long life". Mr. Liao-Fan was only meant to have a short life, was supposed to die at fifty-three. By cultivating according to the teachings whatever we seek, we will attain. Buddhism encourages us to create our own destinies rather than be constrained by them.

Living Buddha Master Zhang Jia said that, "In Buddhism, all our sincere pleas shall be answered". He elaborated further. Some people are unable to get what they want. Why? They did not accord with the teachings. If we understand the principles and methods, and have sought something in accordance with the teachings, then we are assured of receiving a response to our request. If we do not receive the desired response after having accorded with the teachings, it is due to our karmic obstacles. Once we have successfully eradicated these karmic obstacles, we will be

able to gain the desired results. As Master Zhang Jia said, there is nothing we cannot receive once we seek it properly.

Once we understand the fundamental principles, we will understand that "everything in this world and beyond arises from our minds and changes due to our perceptions". If we seek to become Buddhas, we will become Buddhas. If we seek to become heavenly beings, we will become heavenly beings. Everything accords with the mind." The Flower Adornment Sutra tells us that, "We should observe the nature of the Dharma Realm as everything is created by the mind". Therefore, the way of seeking is to accord with the principle that everything arises from our mind, is changed by our perception, our consciousness.

A most suitable and perfect method is the teachings of the Buddha. If we were to seek youth, health, eternal life in accordance with these teachings, can we attain them? Certainly! Master Yun-Gu only taught Mr. Liao-Fan some of the knowledge. Because Mr. Liao-Fan was not very ambitious and only sought worldly fame, wealth and prestige, the master only taught him this limited part.

The master told him that lying is one of the worst offenses in Buddhism. There are four fundamental precepts or rules: no killing, stealing, lying or sexual misconduct. Since, no lying is one of the fundamental precepts, how could the Buddha lie, how could he deceive us? Thus, it is the truth when the master told him that whether seeking children, wealth or long life, all could be obtained. As Mr. Liao-Fan had strictly practiced by following the master's guidance, he obtained what he sought.

I then said I had heard that Mencius once said "Whatever is sought can be attained. The seeking is in ourselves". This refers to inner qualities such as virtue, responsibility and kindness. These are all qualities we can work toward. However, when it comes to outside factors such as wealth, fame and prestige, how can we seek to attain them? The Master replied that Mencius was correct, but that I had misinterpreted his meaning.

Enhancing our inner qualities to become sages and virtuous people is within our control. But how do we seek fame, wealth and prestige? These are external commodities and are also attainable. Whatever we do not have, such as fame or wealth, we can attain by seeking. So it would seem to be destined. Because if we are not destined to have something how could we seek it? This follows most people's understanding of destiny, a constant in predestination. The constant is the cause

that we have created in our past lives and the result that we should receive in this life. We do not yet know that there are variables within the constants, that the results will change with the addition of variables. Indeed fame, wealth, and prestige are attainable by us.

Master Yun-Gu said that Master Hui-Neng, the Sixth Patriarch of the Zen School taught "All the fields of merit are within one's own heart. If one seeks from the true mind within, one can be in touch with all one wishes for". By seeking inside ourselves, we will not only attain the inner qualities of virtue, responsibility and kindness, but we can also attain wealth, fame and prestige. To be able to attain both on the inside and on the outside is beneficial to our reward.

Since ancient times in China, The Platform Sutra, the Diamond Sutra and the Surangama Sutra have been acknowledged as eminent literary works. The eloquent Platform Sutra was written by a Chinese Patriarch, thus to the Chinese it is particularly important. We cannot think of it as solely a sutra of the Zen School. It is an overview of Buddhism as a whole and also could be said to be Master Hui-Neng's report of what he had learned through his study and practice.

Whether attaining something outside of ourselves such as material objects or inside ourselves such as virtues, we still need to seek from inside, from the mind, not from the outside. It would be incorrect to seek from the outside. Why? The outside factor is a constant so it does not change. The mind is a variable so it is not constant, it changes.

For twenty years, Mr. Liao-Fan did not have wandering thoughts, thus, his mind could be considered as having been pure. Not knowing of the variables, his mind accorded completely with the constants. Thus, the twenty years of his life were exactly as Mr. Kong had predicted, everything occurred without the slightest deviation. This was because he did not understand the principle of variables.

Master Yun-Gu taught the principle that "the seeking is in ourselves". virtue, morality, kindness and responsibility are on the inside, they are the cultivation of virtuous conduct. Fame, wealth and prestige are on the outside, they are the enjoyments in life. To be able to receive both kinds of benefits is invaluable. As is said in the Flower Adornment Sutra, "Not to be hindered in the matter of existing things or reality principles", is the ultimate and perfect enjoyment, the great perfection

of both the inside and the outside. It is when everything is going as we wish. It is when we are satisfied with everything. It is to be liberated. It is to do all that is benevolent, all that is noble as we wish. If we cannot attain such wonderful results then no one would want to practice Buddhism.

Buddhism is neither negative nor passive, it is eminently practical. Nowadays, there is nothing more practical than the practice of Buddhism for it addresses reality, addresses something truly attainable. It is crucial that we understand the importance of Buddhism to derive the benefits from it. The truth is that people have misunderstood Buddhism and thus have missed these benefits. If we are able to personally experience them then we will know that of all teachings, Buddhism is a most remarkable and beneficial education. It is definitely not outdated and is as appropriate now as it was three thousand years ago. It is fitting for all people whether in the east or in the west.

Master Yun-Gu then told me that if one cannot reflect inside one's own heart but instead blindly seeks fame, fortune and long life from outside sources, although one may pursue them by using intelligence, one can only attain at most what destiny had entitled one to. To do otherwise, one might lose both inner purity and what one was predestined to have. Then this seeking will have been in vain.

This is pertinent for our world today. Can everyone attain what they are seeking? No. If we attain something it is because we were destined to have it. Only when we receive what we were not destined to have, can it be said that we have gained what we sought. It does not count when we receive what we were supposed to have for we would have attained it without having intentionally sought it.

For example, someone tells us that investing in the stock market is very profitable because they made millions of dollars a year in it. This person simply gained what he or she was supposed to gain. Others who are not destined to make money will simply lose it in the stock market. Not everyone profits from it. If every investor profits, then who loses? Likewise, money won from gambling is something the gambler was meant to have. Even the thief was meant to have what was stolen. If it had not been destined, then he would not have been successful in stealing it.

The ancients understood this, thus they said that, "A person of noble character and integrity is happy to be a noble person, but it is not worth the effort for a bad

person to be bad". Why? They will not be able to escape destiny, the constant. If we could just really understand the principles then all of us would be content with what we have. In this way, we will enjoy a fulfilling life, society will be stable, the world will be peaceful and there will be no more conflicts, no more wars.

Buddhism teaches us to seek for something not destined in our lives, not within the constant. What we are able to attain from seeking comes from the variable. How do we seek? From inside. This is crucial in our world today. Today, we are unable to seek awakening and to develop great virtue from the inside. Why? We do not yet understand. We seek from the outside. We plan and scheme everyday. But in seeking, we need to follow the right path. For even if we have the method, the plan, the means then what? In attaining, we merely attained what we were supposed to attain. Very simple. If we were not supposed to have it, we would not get it. All that we have attained was destined, was the constant. Mr. Liao-Fan understood there was a constant so he did not worry, he did not use various improper ways to seek. He knew his own destiny. He knew that to give rise to wandering thoughts, or to use whatever means possible was doomed to fail if it was not supposed to be.

"To be at a loss, inside and outside". What is the inside? The impure mind. How would we not give rise to afflictions, when our seeking on the outside is frustrated? For twenty years Mr. Liao-Fan conformed to Mr. Kong's predictions. Consequently, he did not lose the inside, he lost the outside. Because he did not think of anything, did not seek anything from the inside but maintained a state of contentment and purity of mind. Everything on the outside is controlled by fate. Everything on the inside is controlled by us.

Average people who fought tooth and nail to seek things from the outside would find that their knowledge and experience were incomparable to those of Mr. Liao-Fan. He had achieved perfect peace of mind. Ordinary people end up with afflicted and unsettled minds. Whatever they attained was something they were destined to have, thus they lost both inside and outside. For if one does not gain, one loses, thus ending up worse off than before. And then there is no benefit at all.

The entire book is available for free here:

<https://archive.org/details/ChangingDestiny>

COMMENTARY

The wisdom contained within this excerpt is profound. Many people today may question the value of astrology, they may say that planets millions of miles away have no bearing on our fates or that it is superstitious. Such views are ignorant.

The reason that astrology and fortune telling works is because our birth date and time reflects our past karma. As unenlightened sentient beings constantly generate volition and wandering thoughts, they unceasingly create and change their karma, which in turn begets and shapes the entire universe. Thus, Heaven, Earth and the Stars are simply reflections of our heart and dictated by our karma. Therefore, subtle signs that reveal a person's future or past can certainly be found by observing mathematical relations, omens and astrology. After all, how could a mirror not reflect the form?

However, astrology and similar arts are by nature **superficial and fixed**. Just as a mirror cannot reveal what lies under the skin, a person's natal chart is likewise nothing more than a vague photograph of his karmic situation at the time of birth. His virtues or lack of virtue will change his natal chart everyday. Thus, just as Liao Fan's Four Lessons state, astrology and fortune telling does not account for variable change ; no one would think it wise to consult an outdated chart or a blueprint of a house that has already been rebuilt. Moreover, just one mistake or wrong interpretation (which does happen due to the obscure nature of astrology) can render the reading useless.

Therefore, this is why the Guanyin Spiritual Response Oracle is superior to all other forms of astrology and divination. As the powers of Guanyin Bodhisattva are the same as that of the Buddha, his samadhi is unsurpassed and unlimited. Hence, he needs no calculations to see the past or future ; his Buddha-eye allows him to see the karma of all sentient beings in action, even the slightest link or change is observed.

Furthermore, nowadays, people often seek only from the outside and neglect to change the inside. They feel that they are smart in doing so, but in reality they are simply grasping at reflections. For instance, according to an ancient Taoist saying:

When our luck turns sour, even gold can change into copper. However, when fortune smiles upon us, even copper can turn into gold.

This is a particularly important verse. People often consider skills or assets to be the tools which will help them realize their dreams. Most believe that by using schemes or gaining degrees, capital and connections, lasting advantages can be obtained. For

instance, the unemployed often consider further education to be the solution that will help them attract recruiters or find new jobs.

However, the truth is that these external things are useless in the grand scheme of things. The only thing that matters is the karmic situation. If we have too many sins, then even ironclad status, wealth and intelligence will disappear in an instant. However, if we have accumulated many merits, our miseries will be automatically turned into bliss within a blink of an eye.

For instance, according to a true account recorded in an edition of the Treatise on Response and Retribution:

Fang Shih-k'o, a native of Hsing-an, had been very sickly from a child. Afterwards he began to enquire into the mysteries of Taoism, with a view of procuring the secret of immortality. Arrived one day at the Cloud-capped Mountain, he met a person of strange appearance, who said, "With such a face as yours, how can you expect to get the blessings that you seek? It is impossible—unless you first plant a root of goodness." Then Shih-k'o went home; and although he was a poor man he found means to print off an edition of the Book of Recompenses and distribute copies among his friends. By the time he had printed ten pages, his sickness was half-cured; when the work was completed, he found himself entirely recovered; and from that time forward he became p. 115 robust in body, and quite different from what he had been before in appearance.

In this case, the merits derived from printing sutras turned Fang Shih-K'o—a poor, sickly and unattractive man—into a strong and handsome person. As stated before, the world and our bodies are composed of the four elements and five skandahs. These factors change in accordance with our karma, which in turn is changed by our good deeds and virtue. Thus, if we diligently accumulate good deeds and support worthy causes—such as printing sutras, creating Buddha images or liberating life—our dreams will certainly come true, like copper turning into gold.

Thus, the takeaway message of Venerable Master Chin Kung's commentary on Liao Fan's Four Lessons is that by cultivating virtue and purity (i.e. doing good deeds and practicing mindfulness), the outside will change for the better. However, forceful seeking or machinations yield only karmic obstacles and whatever that is gained are just rump remnants of an once larger blessing. Lastly, instead of spending money on astrology readings, it will be wiser to use the money on creating merits.

THE POTENT MERITS OF NON-VIOLENCE AND VEGANISM

As the previous section has explained the workings of fate and how to change it, we should hereafter diligently do good deeds to improve our destiny. However, unbeknownst to many, the taking of animal life is the single most serious cause of evil karma in this world. For instance, according to the Discourse on the Forty Eight Inquiries of Non Violence by the eminent Upasaka An Shi:

Whenever slaughter and death comes calling, it is always a pitiful scene. A human being may not meet violence or conflict for tens of years or even hundreds of years. However, the horror of slaughter happens daily to animals. Everyday, as soon as sunrise, knife wielding butchers loom over livestock while hunters prowl the land. Even though animals cry out for help, their efforts are always in vain. These rakshasas masked as humans repeatedly disembowel and boil, inflicting great pain and suffering on animals of all kinds. It takes only a short span of time for hundreds of millions of animals to lose their lives.

As animals have no recourse against the never-ending slaughter, they must silently swallow their grievances. This leads to a dismal atmosphere of mounting evil karma. Eventually, as the evil karma of killing accumulates to the limit, demon kings will descend into the human realm as a response.

The Zen Master Ci Shou once said: "As a result of the sin of animal slaughter, violence and wars will break out. Those who have taken life will in turn lose their lives. Those who have maliciously refused to repay their debts will lose their homes in the chaos. Furthermore, those who have destroyed burrows and nests will have their family members scattered. Each sin will result in the appropriate retribution. Thus, do not fail to heed the Buddha's words."

Therefore, violence and wars are caused by the evil karma of killing. If we are faced with impending violence or conflict, the only recourse is to abstain from killing. The merits from such abstinence is the most potent and materializes speedily. Other good deeds cannot match it.

Hence, the desire to eat meat (something that most people do three times a day) is the main cause of the karmic obstacles that keep us mired in misery and deny us the strength and faith to follow the Buddha's profound wisdom teachings.

Many people may feel that eating meat is natural or that God and Heaven made animals to feed humans. However, this is actually a common wrong view. According

to Upasaka An Shi:

1.) Question: *The ancients have said that Heaven and Earth are the mother of all living beings, and mankind is the paragon of all beings. Therefore, animals were certainly created by Heaven for the benefit of mankind. Thus, why not kill?*

Answer: *As Heaven and Earth are the mother of all living beings, all animals are the beloved offspring of Heaven and Earth. No mother can be happy if among her children, the strong bully the weak and the successful exploit the poor. If you eat meat and feel that it is your right to do so, then by this logic, as tigers can eat humans and mosquitoes suck our blood—are humans not created by Heaven to nourish beasts and pests?*

4.) Question: *If Heaven wishes for mankind to refrain from eating meat, then why isn't the meat of animals disgusting and foul as a deterrence?*

Answer: *The truth is that Heaven already considers meat to be foul and disgusting. However, people believe the taste of meat to be delicious— like how maggots revel in putrid feces. As this is a matter of deep-rooted habits, it is difficult to change perceptions. For instance, if a man was a cat in his past life, he would have craved for rodents during that life. Likewise, if a man was a crane in his past life, he would've craved for snakes. However, as they are now men, they no longer yearn for rats and snakes. Thus, each body has its own habits. Variations in preferences and habits are due to karma, causes and conditions. Differences in karma, causes and conditions are in turn caused by differing intentions. If people's hearts and intentions can accord with Heaven's virtuous will, they will naturally understand that meat is indeed foul and disgusting.*

Furthermore, Upasaka An Shi also points out that the common arguments for culling and hunting are similarly misguided:

3.) Question: *There are so many animals in the world. If no one hunts or slaughters, wouldn't their populations grow out of control?*

Answer: *There are plenty of insects and animals that humans do not eat or kill ; their numbers are numerous without issue. Furthermore, the reason there are so many beasts and animals is due to the karma of killing. Animal rebirth is caused by the cycle of retribution and revenge. People who kill animals are reborn as animals to*

even up the debt. If everyone abstains from taking animal life, the karma that supports the realm of animals will gradually dissipate while the prosperity and ranks of devas and men will increase. For instance, if people do not trap frogs, the population of frogs will decrease. Likewise, if people do not fish for crabs, the population of crabs will gradually decrease. Thus, the laws of karma are quite clear.

Therefore, we should never again be so arrogant to think that it is permissible to kill animals. We must remember Confucius's words on reciprocity, for how can we expect long life, health and cleanliness if we partake in slaughter and bloodshed on a daily basis? Moreover, how can we expect freedom and happiness if we cage animals, exploit them and inflict fear and anxieties on them all the time?

For instance, according to the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua:

Not caging birds in this life, we will not be put into the jail in future lives; Not fishing in this life, we will not become beggars in future lives; Not killing in this life, we will not encounter difficulties in future lives;

“Not caging birds in this life, we will not be put into the jail in future lives.”

Think about it. When someone puts a bird in a cage, he takes its freedom away. By doing that, the person is not abiding by the constitution of this country. This country advocates freedom. Caging a bird is the same as putting the bird behind bars. The bird will start chanting the mantra, “retribution, retribution...” In the future, the bird will go before the Jade Emperor, who is the Lord of the Heavens, and file a suit against the person who caged it.

The Heavenly Lord will say, “Okay, this person has not been fair. He shall undergo the retribution!” You will then go to jail in future lives. This is because the bird has been chanting the mantra of retribution from morning to night. When the Heavenly Lord hears it, his verdict is that the person who caged the bird should be put behind bars.

Thus, if we look at the world and feel that abuses are rampant, all we need to do is to look at our own habitual and institutionalized cruelty towards animals and the causes of tyranny and our social ills will become fully visible.

In fact, today, hundreds of billions of animals are slaughtered each year just to satisfy the desires of a few billion humans. No wonder the Buddha said in the Infinite Life

Sutra that those who cultivate virtue in this world for ten days can reap the same amount of merits that would take those in other worlds a whole millennium to amass. Furthermore, it is also the tradition in many parts of the world to make sacrifices of animals to gods and deities. This is actually a grave mistake. According to Upasaka An Shi's:

18.) Question: There is no question that those who are vegan should make vegan offerings to deities and their ancestors. However, if those who normally eat meat were to make vegan offerings, wouldn't that be cheap and disrespectful?

Answer: The I Ching states: "A family that sacrifices a cow to honor their ancestors derive inferior merit compared to the family that regularly makes modest offerings." Moreover, the Zuo Zhuan states: "Even the wild plants next to the mountain streams or the algae can be offered to gods and spirits." Thus, do you think the gods and spirits who dwell in the skies will quibble over a few pieces of meat?

19.) Question: Will gods and deities who accept meat offerings be reborn in the evil realms?

Answer: Sentient beings are reborn as gods and deities because they have cultivated virtue in their past life. Even though they are all virtuous, some are more merciful than others. The more merciful gods will reject offerings of meat. However, the gods that still have habits of anger will accept meat offerings. The merciful gods have more wisdom than blessings ; the angry gods have more blessings than wisdom. Therefore, once the heavenly blessings of the merciful gods end, they will not be reborn in the evil realms. However, the gods that are given to anger will most likely be reborn in the lower realms. Everyone must understand that Heaven cherishes all living beings, not just human life.

Hence, not only are animal sacrifices unnecessary and pointless, severe negative karma also results from such sacrifices. Moreover, like low quality incense, animal sacrifices will actually repel compassionate gods and attract more malicious deities and spirits. Such deities will bring negative influences and fail to bestow the selfless, profound and reliable blessings that we all seek. Therefore, pure vegan offerings such as fruits, flowers and candles are the best way to honor our ancestors and show respect to the Buddha and Heaven.

Furthermore, according to Venerable Master Hsuan Hua's commentary on the

Shurangama Sutra:

During the reign of the Emperor Wu of Liang, the Buddhadharma flourished. Whenever there was a wedding reception Dharma Masters were invited to recite Sutras. On children's birthdays, Dharma Masters were invited to recite Sutras. In short, no matter what the occasion, Dharma Masters were invited to recite Sutras and give their blessing. They would give a short speech about the auspiciousness of the event - what a lucky occasion it was. At that time there was a wealthy man who was celebrating the marriage of his son. He invited Ch'an Master Chih Kung to recite Sutras and give the blessing. When Ch'an Master Chih Kung arrived and looked around, he said:

***How strange! How bizarre!
The grandson marries the grandmother.
The daughter eats the mother's flesh.
The drum the son beats is stretched
with the father's skin.
Pigs and sheep are on the seat.
The six close kin cook in the brazier.
People gather to celebrate.
I see all this as a form of suffering.***

Why was the grandson marrying his grandmother? It was because when the grandson was two years old, his grandmother died. As she was dying, she grabbed her grandson's hand and said, "I'm at the point where I can let go of everyone else, but I can't forget about my grandson. Who will take care of him in the future?" And she died clutching her grandson's hand.

After her death she went before King Yama and he said, "Oh, you love your grandson so much? Fine. Go back and be your grandson's wife." So she was reborn as a woman and when she came of age, her grandson chose her as his wife. How did Ch'an Master Chih Kung know this? Because he had the ability to know others' thoughts and the ability to perceive past lives - he had the Buddha Eye.

When he looked in front of the house he said, "The daughter eats the mother's flesh," because he saw a little girl chewing on a chunk of pork. Her mother had died and been reborn as a pig. The pig had been slaughtered and cooked, and she was actually eating the flesh of her own mother!

When he inspected the musicians in the band by the entrance way, he said, "The drum the son beats is stretched with the father's skin." The drummer was hitting a drum stretched with deer-hide. His father had died and been reborn as a deer. The deer had been slaughtered and its hide tanned and the drummer was actually beating his own father!

Then Ch'an Master Chih Kung noticed that "Pigs and sheep are on the seat." He saw pigs and sheep sitting like guests on the k'ang - the high brick beds in the house. They were people now, but in their former lives they had been pigs and sheep. In their former lives they themselves had been eaten, so now they were reborn as people who in turn ate pigs and sheep to even up the debt.

When the Ch'an Master took a look at the cooking pots' he exclaimed, "Six close kin cook in the brazier." The six kinds of close kin refer to relatives on the father's side and the mother's side, kin of the brother and sisters, and so forth. They had been close relatives of these people but now had been reborn as pigs and sheep, had been slaughtered, and were being cooked in the brazier.

Ch'an Master Chih Kung summarized, "People gather to celebrate." Everyone who came was saying, "Congratulations!" and "Best Wishes!" But the Master notes, "I see all this as a form of suffering." What I see is actually suffering.

Master Hsuan Hua makes it clear that people are reborn together as family members due to interconnected karmic affinities, debts and credits that have accrued since time immemorial. Thus, it is very likely for deceased parents to be reborn as livestock that will be eaten by their still living children. So imagine that! How many people have unwittingly killed and eaten their loved ones while still grieving over their losses?

Furthermore, the Buddha has said that those who refrain from taking animal life will accumulate merits that will allow them to be long lived, healthy, safe and fortunate. The two accounts below are clear verifications of the Buddha's words. These true historical accounts are from an edition of the Jade Record written by a Chinese cultivator who met King Yama during meditation.

The Merciful Scholar:

During the Song dynasty, there was a young scholar who had tried and failed several times to pass the imperial examinations. Four years after his first failed attempt, he again travelled to the imperial capital to take part in the latest round of examinations.

He lodged himself in an inn and proceeded to study through the night in preparation for the upcoming exam. However, he soon became fatigued and dozed off. Just as he was about to slip into deep sleep.....a vision of a distressed and bloodied white rabbit suddenly appeared! The rabbit pleaded with him to free it along with several other small animals held in the inn cellar.

The scholar immediately awakened and was initially doubtful at what he had just seen. Nevertheless, curiosity prompted him to silently sneak into the cellar. Surprisingly—there was indeed several animals locked in a cage. What he saw reflected his vision perfectly.

He soon realized that these trapped pheasants and small game were to be later served as main courses. Feeling ashamed over the fact that he too ate game, he hastily helped the animals to flee by opening the cage and cellar window. However, the injured white rabbit that had appealed to him for help remained traumatized and huddled in the corner. Thus, the scholar silently packed his bags in the middle of the night and personally carried the rabbit with him on his way out.

Eventually, while trying to find a new place to stay, the duo stopped to rest under an arbor. Suddenly—out of the blue—a celestial devi appeared before him. She was fair beyond imagination and possessed a radiant golden complexion. As soon as she stretched her elegant hands towards the scholar, the rabbit quickly jumped into her arms. The devi then revealed that the rabbit he saved belonged to her. It had been violently captured while patrolling the mortal world. As the

rabbit reassumed its celestial form, the injuries it had sustained miraculously disappeared. She explained that even though he was not a man of high wisdom, his kind and merciful heart had generated enough merits to gain high office. She reminded him to be kind towards the citizenry and to diligently protect living beings for the rest of his life. Having said that, the devi instantly disappeared. The young scholar was left in awe at the magnificent sight he had just witnessed.

The scholar proceeded to lodge himself at another inn and took the imperial exams the next day. Even though he did not achieve the prestigious academic honors he had sought after, he was still awarded a magistracy. Furthermore, he was quickly and continuously promoted by his superiors. Reflecting on this, he finally understood the power of good deeds and henceforth liberated life everyday. In addition to buying captive animals slated for slaughter and setting them free, he also became vegan and promoted veganism.

Years soon passed and the young scholar was now 54 years old. Furthermore, he had also reached the exalted post of Chancellor of State. Despite his unceasing efforts to liberate life and the fact that he had convinced many to stop eating meat, he still felt that his impact was limited. The courtiers, aristocrats and members of the imperial family all scoffed at his scruples and continued to feast sumptuously on various meats such as lamb, shellfish, bear paws and beef. They did not feel even a hair's breadth worth of shame at their cruelty and excess.

The scholar felt sorrow over the never ending slaughter and thus tendered his retirement. After returning to his hometown, he spent his remaining years using his substantial pension to adopt stray dogs and suffering animals.

When he turned 76, he again saw the white rabbit that he had previously saved perched gracefully on his window sill. The scholar (who was on his deathbed) understood that his lifespan was up. Regretting that he could not turn the tide against meat eating, he expressed his apologies. However, the white rabbit quickly led him to his front gate where to his amazement, all the souls of the countless animals he had saved over the years were crowded around his residence. The rabbit then said: "As your stocks of merit are full to the point of overflowing, the Heavenly Lord Lao Tzu wishes to bestow upon you a place among the gods. Otherwise, you could have your lifespan extended by 30 years. Your choice!" The scholar replied that 30 years was too short and expressed his wish to rise to the side of the Heavenly Lord and assist him in promoting virtue.

Hence, he peacefully closed his eyes and ascended towards his celestial villa, accompanied by the white rabbit he had saved so many years before.

Guanyin Bodhisattva's Visit to a Butcher:

In 1908, there lived in Shanxi province a butcher named Chang. His parents (who were also butchers) had already passed away, leaving him alone in the world with only his sickly younger sister for company. Everyday, he slaughtered a pig and sold the meat for a living.

Ironically, when Chang was young, he had detested the cruelty involved in slaughtering pigs. However, as he was the only heir to the family butchery, his parents forced him to learn the trade. By the time he was 25, he was already known in his village as the guillotine that all pigs fear. In fact, the total number of pigs he had slaughtered was so numerous that if all the skulls of the pigs he had killed were lined up in a straight line, it would span several miles.

One day, a old woman visited the village and approached Chang's butchery. She said to him, " I will show you the way to a future fortune if you could give me two porkers free of charge." Chang thought that the old woman was mentally ill and thus ignored her. However, the old woman responded to this snub by recounting in detail his life, history and family situation. She also warned him that this was his last chance to extricate himself from his evil karma.

Startled by the fact that this stranger knew everything about him, Chang immediately suspected that she was a deity and proceeded to comply with her request for two porkers. She left right after taking possession of the two porkers, leaving Chang somewhat bewildered. Nevertheless, he was happy to have not offended a potential deity. However, before she disappeared from sight, she turned back towards Chang and shouted —"I'll be back tomorrow!"

The next day, she came back to Chang's butchery and requested that he give her four pigs. Chang immediately became irate and accused her of being a greedy fraud. However, she paid no heed to his anger and simply repeated her request for four pigs. Chang then demanded to know what happened to the two porkers he gave her the day before. She replied that she had released them.

Incensed, Chang immediately launched into an angry tirade. However, the old

woman remained completely calm and simply asked, "Do you understand why I asked for those two porkers?"

Chang ignored the question and continued his tirade. Suddenly and without warning, the old lady ascended into the air and transformed into Guanyin Bodhisattva! Faced with such a majestic and august sight—Chang promptly fell to his knees in reverence despite not being a Buddhist.

The Bodhisattva did not wait for Chang to compose himself, immediately, Chang was shown a vision which revealed that the two porkers were actually his parents. They had been reborn as pigs to atone for their sins. Hence, he was just a few moments away from committing patricide and matricide had the Bodhisattva not intervened. Feeling immense shock and guilt, Chang begged the Bodhisattva to show him the way forward.

The Bodhisattva said, " Your lifespan has been reduced considerably because of your offenses. Thus, if you wish to save yourself , you must henceforth cease all acts of killing. Furthermore, you must protect the pigs currently in your pigsty for the rest of their natural lives. Afterwards, you must liberate 10,000,000 pigs in order to fully rectify your karmic situation. The first pig to die in your pigsty will show you the way."

As soon as these words were spoken, the Bodhisattva vanished into thin air. It was not difficult for Chang to keep the pigs currently in his pigsty, but he was doubtful that he could ever liberate 10,000,000 pigs. Nevertheless, after thinking of the Bodhisattva's assurances, he diligently proceeded to do as instructed. From that moment on, he treated his pigs like family. Eventually, word spread that he had renounced his career as a butcher. However, he never told anyone about his encounter with Guanyin Bodhisattva. He simply exhorted people to liberate life and refrain from slaughtering animals.

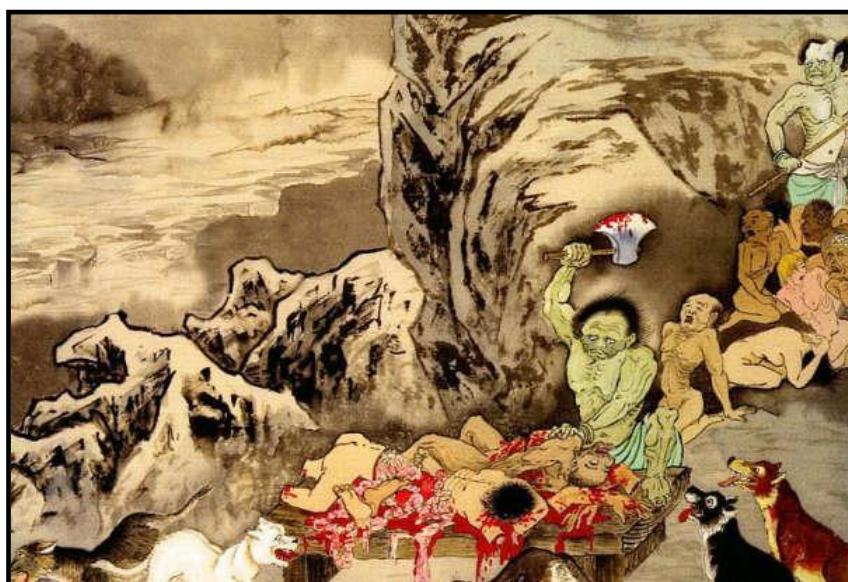
After a few years had passed, one of the pigs fell ill and was on the verge of death. As he was comforting the dying pig, it suddenly started to repeatedly oink towards a spot on the ground. A curious Chang immediately started to dig.... and to his great surprise, crude oil begun to seep out! A short while later, surveyors concluded that his pigsty was located above an oil reserve. He promptly sold his property and mineral rights for tens of thousands of silver dragons. He then used this capital to engage in commerce, generating for himself a fortune in the

process. Everyday, he would send men into the market to purchase live pigs, thereafter depositing these pigs into Buddhist animal sanctuaries. After doing so for 50 years, he finally managed to save 10,000,000 pigs.

Chang lived to the ripe old age of 78. When he died, he left behind a wealthy family. Also, due to the karma created by his good deeds, he was able to avoid the wars of that period—safely retreating to Taiwan after the Communist takeover.

By simply saving the lives of several small animals, the scholar was able to amass enough merits to gain a lifetime of high offices. Furthermore, his remuneration and pension likely amounted to a fortune of tens of thousands of silver taels. In comparison, a small family could live for a year on just a few taels of silver during that time. He did not originally have such good fortune pending, but that one act of opening the cage yielded these rewards. Moreover, due to his further efforts to promote veganism and liberate life, he was able to ascend to a blissful heavenly rebirth at the time of death. Besides, he was also offered a lifespan extension of thirty years ; long life is an inalienable karmic reward for those who do not kill.

The same goes for the butcher. By simply renouncing his butcher's knife and protecting his remaining sounder of pigs for a few years, he managed to create such a large stock of good fortune that oil manifested below his land. Furthermore, his further efforts to liberate life extended his originally meager lifespan by over half a century! All this does not include the additional benefit of having the entirety of his prior evil karma eradicated. Thus, Chang went from a man on the verge of rebirth in the hells to a long lived and wealthy merchant. Chang's case is the epitome of the Buddhist maxim: **The butcher who drops his knife can become a saintly Bodhisattva on the spot.** Besides, in the latest edition of the Jade Record, illustrated by Jiang Yi Zi (江逸子) through psychography, the hellish rebirth that would have awaited Chang had he not changed is illustrated below:



The deity that guided Jiang's hand when he drew these pictures is actually the Demigod Magistrate Cheng Huang. He holds the rank of Praetor in the administration of the Four Heavenly Kings and his duty is to promote the laws of karma. Thus, these pictures provide us with an accurate idea of the horrifying karmic retributions that awaits those who slaughter animals.

Furthermore, in a set of short ancient historical accounts verified by Master Yin Guang, two of them reveal the supreme merits that result from not eating beef. While the killing of any animal for its meat is a severe offense, the gravest is the killing of cows.

According to the first of the two accounts: A member of a travelling theater troupe once met the wandering ghost of his deceased neighbor (who had died abroad). The ghost asked for permission to share the ferry he had hired, so that he (the ghost) may return home to take up abode in his ancestral shrine. The actor agreed. Eventually, the actor asked the ghost, "What does King Yama consider to be the gravest karmic offense?" The ghost replied, "Eating beef is the most serious sin—those who eat beef are devoid of fortune and bereft of divine protection—on the other hand, those who abstain from it will be blessed by the gods and accrue excellent stocks of merit!"

Hearing this, the actor immediately vowed that he would never eat beef again. However, the ghost immediately burst into tears and exclaimed: "I can no longer return home! The auspicious spirits of good karma who now protect you will not allow a sinful being like me to accompany you." Dejected, the ghost climbed overboard and wandered away. Overawed by this revelation, the actor quickly rushed back to his village and convinced everyone to refrain from eating beef.

Unfortunately in this account, the actor did not know that he could dedicate his merits to the ghost. If he had done so, the poor ghost would have been immediately transformed into a radiant deva possessing a celestial palace (see the Petavatthu for more info).

Likewise, according to the second account: A minor local official of Suzhou province once circulated letters that encouraged people to abstain from beef. He did so after the spirit of a deceased colleague appealed to him to make merits on his behalf. As a result of this deed, the deceased colleague became a deva and the local official's lifespan was extended by six twelve year periods! Furthermore, his stocks of merit were filled to the brim.

In Lao Tzu's Treatise on Response and Retribution, it is stated that grave sins result in one's lifespan being shortened by a period of twelve years and vice versa. Thus, the local official increased his lifespan by a whopping seventy two years by simply encouraging the local community to refrain from eating beef. This increase in lifespan was also accompanied by wealth, happiness, offices and future heavenly rebirth.

Therefore, how much more will be our reward if we abstain from all types of meat and diligently promote veganism? If everyone could abstain from animal slaughter, the whole world can become the utopia of our dreams!

Furthermore, according to Upasaka An Shi:

16.) Question: What should we do if we find ourselves powerless to stop acts of fishing, trapping and slaughtering?

Answer: Anyone who finds themselves in such a situation should sincerely recite whatever mantra they are familiar with, or sincerely recite **Namo Amitabha**. They should repent the animals' sins on their behalf and dedicate the merits of the recitation to them. This way, the animals will naturally receive karmic benefits.

*If you see someone fishing or trapping, then focus your attentions on that person. Do not entertain other thoughts. Single-mindedly recite **Namo Duo Bao Tathagata** (南無多寶如來) for a few dozen times. If you do so, the fish and animals will all be able to evade capture. This Buddha's name is very potent, so do not fail to do as instructed.*

Upasaka An Shi's answer reveals to us a little known but important mantra. Just like reciting Guanyin Bodhisattva will extricate us from imminent danger, sincerely reciting **Namo Duo Bao Tathagata** while focusing on a fisherman or trapper will allow fish and animals to escape capture. Furthermore, this mantra can also be pronounced as **Namo Duo Bao Rulai**.

As this important mantra is a convenient method to save lives and cultivate compassion, we should not forget to recite it whenever the situation presents itself. Furthermore, we should not fear that reciting this mantra will interfere with the livelihoods of hunters and fishermen, for according to Upasaka An Shi :

5.) Question: *There are many who eke out a living by fishing or working in the meat packing industry. If we exhort them to change professions, we would be causing them financial ruin. Isn't it unreasonable to favor animals over humans?*

Answer: *Those who support themselves in such a manner are like a man who eats poisoned meat to satiate his hunger. Even though they may be able to live comfortably off the earnings for a while, they will soon have to undergo many kalpas of excruciating karmic retribution. The reason we urge hunters, fishermen, ranchers, butchers and so forth to change professions is because we are concerned about them. Thus, how can we be considered unreasonable? Aren't there plenty of people who support themselves very well without having to kill animals?*

Lastly, many people may feel that it is their filial duty to slaughter animals in order to furnish their parents or loved ones with the dishes they are partial to. However, Upasaka An Shi also addresses this:

20.) Question: *It is indeed wrong to slaughter animals for the purpose of making meat offerings to gods and deities. However, is it also wrong to slaughter animals to feed one's parents?*

Answer: *It is even worse! The Book of Rites clearly states that: "Filial sons and daughters offer all that which is good to their parents and retain only the inferior for themselves." Therefore, if we slaughter animals for the sake of offering meat to our parents, we would be saddling them with undesirable karmic offenses. How could we do something so unfilial? If we must provide our parents with meat, we should offer only thrice clean meat (i.e. meat that did not come from an animal that one personally ordered slaughtered or heard and or seen slaughtered). Meat from an animal that died naturally is permitted as well. These are the only two exceptions for this case.*

In conclusion, it should be very clear by now that hunting, animal sacrifices, fishing, meat eating or engaging in the meat packing business will lead to heavy karmic debts. Thus, if we wish to be long lived and happy—and if we want to avoid atrocities and hellish karmic retributions—then we should diligently liberate life, abstain from meat and encourage others to do the same. If we sell food and provide catering services for a living, we should not sell meat products or dishes containing meats. The good karma generated from such abstinence will ensure happiness in this life and heavenly bliss in the next. If we dedicate these merits towards Buddhahood in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, we will surely realize our aspiration!

Recommended Charity: Tainan Avalokitesvara Homeland Buddhist Association



Website: <http://www.avalokitesvara.tw/Donation.php>

Sanctuary gallery: http://www.avalokitesvara.tw/Pet1_pic.php

Email: a0981552011@gmail.com

Facebook: <https://zh-tw.facebook.com/avalokitesvara2013>

This charity is registered with the government of Taiwan. Their mission is to save cattle, pigs, rabbits, poultry, goats, fish and the like from slaughter by purchasing and moving them to their sprawling animal sanctuary in Tainan county (pictured).

AMITABHA MINDFULNESS, THE EPITOME OF THE DHARMA

The Buddha spoke many sutras and Dharma-doors (ways to enlightenment) throughout his life. Nevertheless, the Buddha has foretold that the Dharma-door of Infinite Life (Amitabha Mindfulness) is the only practical method for our time. This is not to say that Zen, Vipassana and the like are no longer valid, it simply means that most of us no longer have the underlying ability to cultivate them.

The difference between the Dharma-door of Amitabha and the other Dharma-doors is that cultivators of the former can rely on Amita Buddha's great vows while the cultivators of the latter must rely solely on their own abilities. For instance, in the Shurangama Sutra, the Buddha warns that those who wish to cultivate samadhi on their own will have to navigate through the lies and temptations of deviant heavenly demons as well as the false beliefs of Buddhahood that often arise during advanced meditation (e.g. 50 Skandha Demons). Failure to successfully navigate through these dangers often condemns the cultivator to rebirth in the Relentless Hells.

Thus, even though the Shurangama Sutra is commonly associated with the Zen school, it is actually an indirect Pureland Buddhist Sutra. The Buddha is highlighting the difficulties of relying on your own power and contrasting these perils with the effortless ease that those who cultivate Bodhi via Amitabha Pureland Buddhism enjoy. In fact, the last paragraph of Chapter 5 of the Shurangama Sutra was selected by Patriarch Yin Guang as one of the five principle texts of Pureland Buddhism (this treatise is included on page 88).

Furthermore, according to the Shurangama Sutra and eminent Dharma Masters such as the Ven. Master Chin Kung and Ven. Master Hsuan Hua, all major world religions (e.g. Catholicism) were actually spoken by transformations of Guanyin Bodhisattva to benefit those who could not yet accept Buddhism. Hence, that is why Christianity stresses absolute faith in God as the key to eternal salvation. As Pureland Buddhism is based on single-minded faith in Amita Buddha, such beliefs are to acclimate sentient beings to the principle of single-mindedly taking refuge in Amitabha. This is so that when they are finally reborn as Buddhists, they can more easily give rise to profound faith and concentration in Amitabha.

Thus, due to the simplicity and effectiveness of the Dharma-door of Amitabha, the Buddha gave many sermons of the Infinite life Sutra during his life. This is why there are so many existing versions of the Infinite Life Sutra. However, even though all

versions are valid, the compilation version by Upasaka Xia Lian Ju (夏蓮居) is the most comprehensive and universally recognized version. Not only does Upasaka Xia combine the last five remaining extant versions of the Infinite Life Sutra into one grand version: **The Buddha Speaks the Mahayana, Infinite Life, Adornment, Purity, Impartiality, and Enlightenment Sutra** (佛說大乘無量壽莊嚴清淨平等覺經), he also did so without changing a single character! Moreover, the Venerable Master Chin Kung has repeatedly stated that Upasaka Xia's Infinite Life Sutra is the most important sutra of our time and the only one he would recommend.

In order to understand the numerous advantages of Pureland Buddhism, we need to first read Amita Buddha's 48 Great Vows. According to Chapter 6 of Upasaka Xia Lian Ju's Infinite Life Sutra, Amita Buddha (then a Bodhisattva named Dharmakara) had vowed that when he attained Buddhahood (which he did 10 kalpas ago), the following 48 Vows will take effect and be valid in perpetuity:

THE FORTY EIGHT VOWS OF AMITA BUDDHA

Introduction:

The 48 Vows of Amitabha represents the cornerstone of Pureland Buddhism. They signify Amita Buddha's eternal promise to all sentient beings—be they devas, humans, insects, microbes, ghosts or hell beings. Lastly, any reference hereinafter to "the Way" or "Dharma" etc. generally refers to the Dharma-door of Pureland Buddhism.

Sutra Vows 1-2 : The Vows of No Evil and Suffering

"If I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, my Buddha-land will be adorned with infinite and inconceivable merits. There shall be no hell beings, emaciated ghouls, wild beasts, pests and pestilences in my land. Sentient beings arriving to dwell in my land, even from the hells or evil paths, will all share my merit and become Bodhisattvas at once. They shall never again fall back into the states of suffering. Until these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vows 3-5 : The Vows of Equal and Majestic Appearances

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, all sentient beings from the ten quarters who are reborn in my land shall assume majestic appearances as august as Tyrian purple and as fair as the finest gold. They will be regal in countenance and possess

all of the Buddha's 32 fine features. Furthermore, their bodies will be upright, pure and without outflows. The splendor of their appearances shall all be equal. If some are handsome while others hideous, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vows 6-8: The Vows of Clairvoyance and Clairaudience

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, all sentient beings who are reborn in my land will have the Divine-Ear and Buddha-Eye. They shall, without limit, be able to recall all of the good and evil habits of their innumerable past lives. Also, their acuity and powers of postcognition and precognition will be unlimited. Every event occurring across the ten directions will be known to them. Neither the slightest sound nor the faintest sight could escape them. Until these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vow 9: The Vow of the All Knowing Heart

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, all sentient beings who are reborn in my land shall be able to see through the hearts and minds of each and every being living across the incalculable and inconceivable world-systems. Until this vow is fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vows 10-11: The Vows of Transcendental Powers and Limitless offerings

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, all sentient beings who are reborn in my land shall be complete with perfect ease and the six transcendental powers. Furthermore, they will be able to instantly manifest anywhere they desire and simultaneously make offerings to innumerable Buddhas across the ten directions. Until these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vow 12: The Vow of Samadhi and Perfect Wisdom

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, all sentient beings who are reborn in my land shall be bestowed with Samadhi that will free them from every outflow and attachment. They will all become irreversibly established on the path towards perfect wisdom (Bodhi). Until this vow is fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vow 13-14: The Vows of Infinite and Serene Light

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, my light shall shine brightly across the ten directions. When I appear before sentient beings—as soon as my light touches them—they shall feel bliss as their afflictions dissolve. They will immediately be reborn in my land. Until these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vow 15-16: The Vows of Infinite Life and Incalculable Populace

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, all sentient beings who are reborn in my land shall have infinite life. Even if an entire congregation of as many Paccekabuddhas as there are living beings in a great trichiliocosm should spend hundreds of thousands of kalpas trying to calculate the lifespan of any one of the countless Sages in my land—a figure would still be unreachable. Until these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Commentary:

A finite lifespan is one of the greatest threats to those seeking Bodhi. This is because death and rebirth dampens the momentum of their cultivation. For instance, if a diligent cultivator suddenly died and was reborn as a deva, he would likely become so distracted by his impermanent newfound luxuries that he could no longer concentrate on seeking liberation. If he was reborn as a human (womb born), it would take him some time to grow up and refresh his roots of wisdom. However, rebirth in Pureland guarantees infinite life. As all beings who are reborn in Pureland become Bodhisattvas due to Amita Buddha's blessings, they have naturally far transcended the Samsara and the pains of birth and death. With infinite life and the exalted environment of Pureland, Unsurpassed Bodhi is easily attained.

Sutra Vow 17: The Vow of Universal Recognition

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, all the Buddhas across the ten quarters will join in unison to praise the infinite merits of my name and the peerless virtues of my Buddha-land. Until this vow is fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Commentary:

According to Venerable Master Chin Kung, the name of Amita Buddha represents the names, teachings and combined merits of all the Buddhas across the ten quarters. Hence, this is why all the Buddhas across the ten quarters commend Amita Buddha and his Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Sutra Vow 18: The Pureland Rebirth Upon Ten Recitations Vow

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, sentient beings of the ten quarters who joyously and single-mindedly seek rebirth in my land after hearing my name—wholeheartedly dedicating all their merits towards this aspiration with each new thought—will be reborn in my land upon reciting my name for ten times. Until this vow is fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Note: The Chinese text includes an exception for those who slandered the Dharma or committed the five grave offenses. However, Vow 21 contradicts this prohibition. Hence, this contradiction means that this exception was meant only as a warning to prevent people from committing such heavy evil offenses. As long as they repent, Pureland will certainly accept them with open arms.

Sutra Vows 19-20: The Resolve For Bodhi Vow and the Vow of the Sagely Welcoming Party

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, sentient beings of the ten quarters who resolve to attain Bodhi in my land after hearing my name, who subsequently dedicate all the merits and virtues from their lifelong practice of the Six Paramitas towards this aspiration, and who single-mindedly recites my name through day and night without cease, will meet me during their last moments. I shall welcome them into my land while surrounded by an august retinue of Sages. They will instantly become Mahabodhisattvas. Until these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vows 21: The Vow of Forgiveness

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, there would not be one virtuous and willing sentient being who could not easily attain rebirth in my land. However, if sentient beings who have long committed evil repent after hearing my name, and thereafter

adheres to the Buddhadharma while yearning for rebirth in my land, then such beings will be saved from the evil paths and rise to my land upon their deaths. Until this vow is fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vows 22-24: The Vows of No Womanhood and the Vow of the Lotus Bud Transformation

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, the retribution of womanhood will not exist in my land. If women who loathe the burdens of their gender become sincerely resolved upon attaining Bodhi in my land after hearing my name, then they shall be transformed into Bodhisattvas upon such a rebirth. Sentient beings of the ten quarters who are reborn in my land will be transformed while dwelling in palatial lotus buds floating upon the glistening waters of the Seven Jeweled Lagoon. Until these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Commentary:

Sentient beings who are reborn in Pureland will become Bodhisattvas by transformation. This means that if you achieve such a rebirth, you will instantly manifest as an enlightened Bodhisattva. There is no pain of birth or inconvenience of growing up in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Sutra Vows 25-27: The Vows of Good Karma and Virtue

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, sentient beings of the ten quarters who are inspired by my name to sincerely cultivate the Bodhisattva Way shall be respected by both men and devas. Moreover, sentient beings who merely hear my name will be reborn as virtuous aristocrats possessing wealth, knowledge and auctoritas. Their bodies will be healthy and complete. Lastly, they will enjoy cultivating the highest Dharma. Until these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Commentary:

These vows represent the most basic benefits of reciting Amita Buddha's name. Simply hearing or perceiving this name will guarantee a good rebirth and future opportunities to learn Buddhism. Furthermore, in the Contemplation Sutra, it is stated that just one recitation of Amita Buddha's name can eradicate eight billion eons worth of heavy karmic offenses. Hence, those who fail to achieve Pureland rebirth despite

having recited the name will still amass enormous stocks of merit.

Sutra Vows 28-31: The Vows of Virtue, Purity, Detachment and No Outflows

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, my land will be free from even a hint of evil. All sentient beings who are reborn in my land shall be united in proper virtue and purity. They will be forever free from afflictions and attachments. Moreover, they will enjoy the same bliss as a bhikshu without outflows. If residents of my land should retain false thoughts and attachments to the body, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vows 32-34: The Vows of Incorruplicability, Eloquence and Expoundance

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, those who are reborn in my land will all possess infinite good roots. Hence, their bodies shall be as incorruplicable as the Buddha's. They will also have radiant halos above their heads. An affirmation of their infinite wisdom, omniscience and eloquence. Thus, they will naturally expound the Dharma like clockwork. Until these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vows 35-36: The Vows of Swift Perfection

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, sentient beings of the ten quarters who are reborn in my land shall swiftly attain Buddhahood. Excepted are Bodhisattvas who have made Mahayana vows to liberate beings across the ten quarters. Using various expedient devices, they will unfailingly inspire sentient beings to bring forth faith in the teachings of Samantabhadra. Until these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vows 37-38: The Vows of Abundance and the Receipt of Offerings

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, sentient beings who are reborn in my land shall be instantly furnished with whatever food, drink, attires and requisites that they wish for—no one will be left unsatisfied. If those dwelling in my land shall seek to make offerings to Buddhas across the ten quarters, rich offerings will instantly appear before all the Buddhas of the ten quarters as a response to that thought. Until these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vow 39: The Vow of Infinite Augustness

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, all aspects of my land shall be infinitely well adorned and be of indescribable beauty. Even though the residents of my land have the Divine-Eye, they would still be unable to describe the infinite beauty of my land. Until this vow is fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vows 40-41: The Vows of Jeweled and Mirrored Trees

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, the jeweled trees of my land shall be hundreds of thousands of yojanas in height. However, the Bodhi trees next to the Way places will be even taller. No Bodhisattva of my land would fail to perceive this. Those who wish to view the august lands of other Buddhas may do so by simply gazing at the jeweled trees, and what they seek will appear as clear as one's reflection in a mirror. Until these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vow 42: The Vow of Resplendence

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, my land shall be boundlessly expansive and as bright and unblemished as a gleaming mirror. Its light shall pervade warmly across the ten quarters. Any sentient being who can see this light will become irreversible upon the path towards Bodhi. Until this vow is fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vow 43- The Vow of Widespread Treasures and Fragrances

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, everything in my land, from the ground to the skies above, such as the lagoons, arbors, rivulets, villas, halls and pavilions, shall all be composed of untold treasures and scented woods. The fragrances of my land will saturate the entirety of the ten quarters. Any sentient being who can sense it will become resolute in cultivating the Dharma. Until this vow is fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vow 44-45: The Vows of Samadhi and Buddha Offerings

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, Bodhisattvas of the ten quarters who hear my name will immediately gain the Samadhi of purity, release and equality. They shall dwell in the highest Samadhi until they become Buddhas. They will also make

offerings to countless Buddhas while meditating. Unless these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Sutra Vow 46-48: The Vows of Dharani, Patience and Non-Retrogression

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, Bodhisattvas from other worlds who hear my name will immediately become Mahabodhisattvas. They shall abide in equality and dwell in purity, impartiality and perfect wisdom. Lastly, they will instantly reach the state of Avivartika and attain the three stages of endurance. Unless these vows are fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Commentary:

Vows 44-48 are geared primarily towards Bodhisattvas (although they apply to all sentient beings as well). As everyone who achieves rebirth in Pureland attains the level of Avivartika Bodhisattvahood, even a microbe or hell being can become a peer of Guanyin Bodhisattva by sincerely reciting Amita Buddha's name. This benefit is so profound and great that according to the Ven. Master Chin Kung, even Arhats and junior Bodhisattvas do not believe it. With Avivartika Bodhisattvahood, one is practically a Buddha and only a step away from full Buddhahood.

Thus, if we resolve upon Bodhi and single-mindedly recite Amita Buddha's name, sincerely dedicating all of our merits towards rebirth in Pureland, we will be able to see Amita Buddha and be reborn in Pureland. Once we attain such a rebirth, we immediately become a fully enlightened Bodhisattva due to Amita Buddha's blessings. Furthermore, Vow 12 mentions that samadhi capable of eliminating outflows and attachments will be bestowed upon rebirth in Pureland. As any person who is free from outflows and attachments is enlightened, Vow 12 is Amita Buddha's ironclad guarantee of instant enlightenment upon rebirth in Pureland. Thus, we should not entertain any doubts. Buddhas and Sages have only Great Compassion and are completely selfless, their conduct unfailing conforms with the 5 precepts and 10 virtues, thus, their word is their bond.

It is also important that we understand the meaning of the terms "merit" and "virtue" in the context of the Infinite Life Sutra. Normally, all good deeds are considered meritorious and virtuous. However, in the Infinite Life Sutra, it refers solely to the samadhi of reciting Amita Buddha's name. This is because mindfulness of Amita Buddha is actually the utmost act of merit and virtue ; such mindfulness is all

inclusive and encompasses the combined meritorious qualities of every other type of virtue and good deed. If we sincerely recite Amita Buddha's name, we are amassing unmatched stocks of merit and cultivating the Six Paramitas all at once. In fact, all of the great sutras such as the Shurangama Sutra and Flower Adornment Sutra are simply expansions of Amita Buddha's name. They were spoken by the Buddha to serve as indirect Dharma-doors for those who still doubt the unsurpassed advantages of Amita Buddha mindfulness.

For instance, according to Chapter 45 of Upasaka Xia's Infinite Life Sutra,

"In the Dharma extinction age—when the last of my teachings perish and evil flourishes—I will use my powers to protect this Sutra and allow it to last for another hundred years. People who feel joy upon encountering this Sutra and who do their best to cultivate in accordance with it will be able to realize their dreams—no matter what those aspirations may be."

"The appearance of a Buddha is rare and meeting a Thus Come One is even harder. The various sutras spoken by the Buddhas are hard to obtain and difficult to hear. Those who can cultivate in accordance with the proper teachings are even rarer. However, If a person can joyfully hear and accept this Sutra and cultivate in accordance with it, then such a person has accomplished a task of unsurpassed difficulty."

Thus, the merits of the Dharma-door of Amita Buddha are so great that it alone will last for an additional century after all the other Dharma-doors are lost. Moreover, this Dharma-door is so rare and profound that someone who can joyfully cultivate it is doing something that few can ever do. The Buddha once said that human rebirth is as rare as a handful of earth compared to all the soil on the entire planet. However, people who can cultivate this Dharma-door are even rarer.

Therefore, the name of Amita Buddha is unparalleled in terms of merit, wisdom and virtue. It extinguishes all sins and is surpassed by no other sutra or good deed.

The reason for such exalted fruits is that the Dharma-door of Amitabha is the only method that can guarantee Bodhi within one lifetime ; all the other Dharma-doors require numerous kalpas of cultivation before Buddhahood can be achieved. Furthermore, as all sentient beings who are reborn in Pureland become Bodhisattvas made in the image of Amita Buddha, they have the same transcendental powers and

unlimited wisdom that the Buddha possesses. This means that once a man is reborn in Pureland, he can simultaneously save, assist and or liberate all kinds of living beings across the entirety of the ten quarters.

So think about it, as humans, even if we managed to feed a whole country and save millions of lives, there would still be multitudes of people suffering across the world. Moreover, innumerable sentient beings would still be mired in the acute suffering of the hells, animal realms and ghost realms. However, if we instead turn our attentions towards Bodhi in Pureland, we would swiftly achieve Buddhahood and go on to exercise boundless Great Compassion. Therefore, there is no greater good than seeking rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Furthermore, the exalted environment of Amita Buddha's sagely paradise of Pureland cannot be rivaled. As Amita Buddha created his Pureland by amalgamating all the positive attributes of each and every one of the innumerable Buddha-lands in existence, no other Buddha-land can rival its splendor and uniqueness. There is neither impermanence nor suffering there, only the highest bliss and happiness.

The Infinite Life Sutra also provides us with detailed descriptions of the wonders of Pureland. Below are a few selected chapters:

CHAPTER 14, 15, 16 & 17 : THE JEWELLED TREES, BODHI TREES, WAY PLACES AND THE MERITORIOUS RIVERS, PONDS AND LAGOONS

Sutra (Chapter 14):

"Arising from the golden soil of the Land of Ultimate Bliss are countless magnificent jeweled trees. Some are composed of gold or silver while others are made from crystal, elegant cast glass, amber, imperial jade or agate. Each of these trees are purely composed of one type of treasure. However, other jeweled trees are made from two, three or even seven types of precious jewels and treasures. For instance, some trees may have cameo glass bodies, agate berries and crystal blossoms. Others such as the seven jeweled trees may have golden roots, silver trunks, cast glass branches, crystal twigs, amber leaves, imperial jade petals and agate berries. There are innumerable seven jeweled trees of various combinations in the Land of Ultimate Bliss."

"Furthermore, the jeweled trees of Pureland are not only composed of exquisite

treasures—but are also completely balanced and perfectly symmetrical. Even the twigs, flowers, berries and leaves are uniformly well formed and proportioned. The glorious aura and warm radiance of these trees are of indescribable beauty. Moreover, whenever pleasant breezes gently ruffle the leaves, it is as if a celestial concerto grosso is being masterfully performed. Divine music naturally emanate from these wonderful jeweled trees."

Sutra (Chapter 15):

"In addition, there are grand Bodhi trees next to the Sermon Pavilion. These Bodhi trees are four million Han miles in height and five thousand yojanas in circumference. The crown of each tree covers a radius of two hundred thousand Han miles. Composed purely of countless gems and adorned with multitudes of jeweled blossoms and berries, their warm radiance naturally pervades boundlessly."

"Furthermore, wish-fulfilling jewels of various colors such as emerald, ruby and ivory—the foremost of all precious stones—are used prominently as decorative wreaths. The jeweled trunks are wrapped in ribbons made from celestial stars while bells composed of gold and pearls adorn the branches. Moreover, rare and supremely wonderful jeweled meshes adorn the canopies. The hundreds of thousands of divine colors compliment each other to create a glorious aura of majestic and infinite brightness. What a marvelous sight! Such augustness reflects the purity of those who dwell in Pureland."

"When delightful breezes ruffle the leaves and twigs, countless divine sounds of Dharma immediately fill the air. Exquisite, elegant, enlightening and refreshing, these sounds are the foremost of all sounds found across the ten quarters. Anyone who merely sees a Bodhi tree, hears its sounds, tastes its fruits, breathes in its fragrant scents, comes into contact with its august brightness or contemplates its merit will attain Avivartika Bodhisattvahood. Immediately, they will be freed from outflows and afflictions. Moreover, they will become irreversibly established on the path to Unsurpassed Bodhi and attain the three stages of endurance.

"The Buddha said to Ananda: "The rare flora of Pureland turns the Dharma Wheel and creates Buddhas. They exist because of the infinite merits and powers of Amita Buddha and his great vows."

Sutra Chapter 16:

"In the Land of Ultimate Bliss, the Sermon Pavilion and the other structures are also composed of the same exquisite jewels that make up the trees. Furthermore, numerous ornately carved webbed panels and screens—all decorated with white pearls and wish-fulfilling jewels—adorn the splendorous Pavilion and surrounding architecture. The gilded halls, grand villas and celestial palaces of the Bodhisattvas are similarly well adorned and of unmatched beauty."

"Moreover, the Bodhisattvas of Pureland are constantly cultivating with great diligence. Some are speaking the Dharma while others are accepting and listening to it. Some may cultivate Zen or Vajrayana while effortlessly suspended in the air. Protected by Amita Buddha's merits and vows, all of them easily progress through the various stages of Sagehood and soon attain Unsurpassed Bodhi. They joyfully cultivate in accordance with their wishes."

Sutra Chapter 17:

"Moreover, the Sermon Pavilion, halls and palaces are all surrounded by divine streams, ponds and lagoons. These bodies of water are perfectly proportioned in accordance with their surroundings. Some are ten yojanas, twenty yojanas or even hundreds of thousands of yojanas in size, depth and length. The waters are pristine, fragrant and endowed with the eight meritorious virtues. These glistening waters are always sweet, soft, serene, light and clear. They can wash away every affliction and defilement. On the banks and beaches are numerous sandalwood trees and arbors bearing auspicious fruits. They are divinely radiant and diffuse perfumed fragrances. Moreover, their long elegant branches and lush bejeweled leaves form lovely shades above the azure lagoons. The marvelous aromas produced by such flora are simply undreamed of. When gentle breezes ruffle the branches, auspicious blossoms and berries fall gracefully into the waters. They drift along the gentle ripples and exude untold fragrances."

"These rivers and lagoons are all adorned with the seven types of gems, even the river beds are carpeted with golden sand. Furthermore, multitudes of exquisite lotus flowers and water lilies—utpalas, padmas, kumudas and pundarikas—of various rich and celestial colors, adorn the surface of these divine bodies of water. Their vivid complexions and stunning brightness pervades across the entire surface."

"If a Bodhisattva of Pureland chooses to bathe one of these jeweled rivulets, ponds and lagoons, the water will obey their every fancy. If they wish for the water to rise to their ankles, it rises to their ankles. If they wish for it to rise to their waists, it rises to their waists. If they wish for it to rise to their necks, it rises to their necks. If they wish to be completely immersed, it will spontaneously pour over their bodies. If they wish for it to recede, it will immediately recede and leave them as dry as before. Additionally, if they wish for cool water, it will turn cool. If they wish for warm water, it will turn warm. If they wish for the rapidity of the water to change, it will change in accordance with their wishes. These meritorious waters exist only to serve. It comforts the body, eases the mind and washes away the six kinds of dust. It is so pure that it appears formless and so clear that the brightness of the aurulent river bed shines forth from all depths. These delightful and enticing waters swirl gently in graceful overlapping circles."

"Furthermore, the mild waves produce countless wonderful and soothing sounds. Depending on one's wishes, one can hear the sounds of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha or of the paramitas. One may hear the sounds of stillness and purity or the sounds of what neither arises nor ceases to be. One may also hear the sounds of the Ten Strengths of Valor or the sounds of Non-abidance. The sounds of Great Compassion, loving kindness, empathy and equanimity or the anointing of the crown of wisdom with sweet dew may also be heard. Once these sounds are heard, the roots of virtue quickly mature and the heart becomes pure, unattached, upright and impartial. Everything that one hears is in accordance with the Dharma. One alone hears what one wishes to hear and does not hear what one does not seek to hear. One can neither retrogress from Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi nor retreat from the heart of Bodhi."

"Sentient beings of the ten quarters who are reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss will be spontaneously transformed while dwelling in palatial lotus buds floating upon the glistening waters of the Grand Seven Jeweled Lagoon. They instantly obtain radiant bodies that are pure, ethereal, formless and without outflows. They will never again hear even a whisper of terms such as anxieties, burdens, evil realms and the kleshas. Thus, if there exists not even the notion of suffering, how could there be any actual suffering?"

"On the other hand, the sounds of bliss are ever present in Pureland. This is why it is called the Land of Ultimate Bliss."

CHAPTER 19: A DREAM COME TRUE

Sutra:

"Furthermore, sentient beings who have been, will be or are about to be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss will all possess wonderful golden bodies and majestic appearances. Their wisdom and merit will be unlimited. Additionally, they will have perfect ease and transcendental powers. No one is left wanting and everything is plentiful. Elegant palaces, rich ornaments, exquisite flowers, perfumed incense, lush streamers, plush canopies and various other beautifully adorned requisites all arise spontaneously on demand."

"When nourishment is sought for, alms bowls made from seven different kinds of gems will immediately manifest as a response. Divine food, nectar and refreshments of a hundred flavors will appear in sumptuous quantities and disappear when not needed. However, no one actually consumes these aliments. Instead, upon perceiving the profound insight of Dharma's gourmet flavors, they dine only on the pure thoughts resulting from their observation. Thus, they are naturally immortal, refreshed, pure and delighted. They have no attachments to food and drink. What's more, those who dwell in Pureland wear divine tunics and togas woven from soft jeweled threads. Their coronets, laurel wreaths and ornate accessories are likewise composed of numerous precious stones. With such august adornments, their bodies naturally exude infinite light and a myriad of splendorous colors."

"Moreover, the various aspects of their palatial abodes—such as the size, shape or location—are all customized in accordance with their wishes. For instance, some palaces are terrestrial and surrounded by tranquil pools of divine water while others glide among the stars. Furthermore, all residences are adorned with ornate and bejeweled domes. Countless bells composed of precious stones also lend their splendor to these heavenly palaces and villas. The colors and brightness of such elegant celestial dwellings are naturally glorious. Such purity, bliss and peace arise in response to nothing more than a thought. Thus, no one could be unsatisfied."

As we have now seen the exalted environment of Pureland, the only matter that remains are the details on how to get there. Since Amita Buddha's vows makes it clear that resolving for Bodhi and single-minded concentration are the two cardinal factors, we should sincerely cultivate these virtues.

According to Pureland teachings, all who have succeeded in achieving single-minded concentration in Amita Buddha displayed the following tenets in their practice:

Faith: The most important factor is faith in the Amita Buddha. The Dharma-door of Pureland is doubted by many, this is because it is the Dharma in its purest form. Thus, people doubt the Buddha's Great Compassion as they are used to difficulty, quid pro quo and delusion. They cannot believe that the Buddha will offer them everything for nothing on the spot. According to the Ven. Master Chin Kung, the wisdom found in the Infinite Life Sutra is simply unsurpassable. When we read the Infinite Life Sutra, we are in effect reading everything the Buddha had taught!

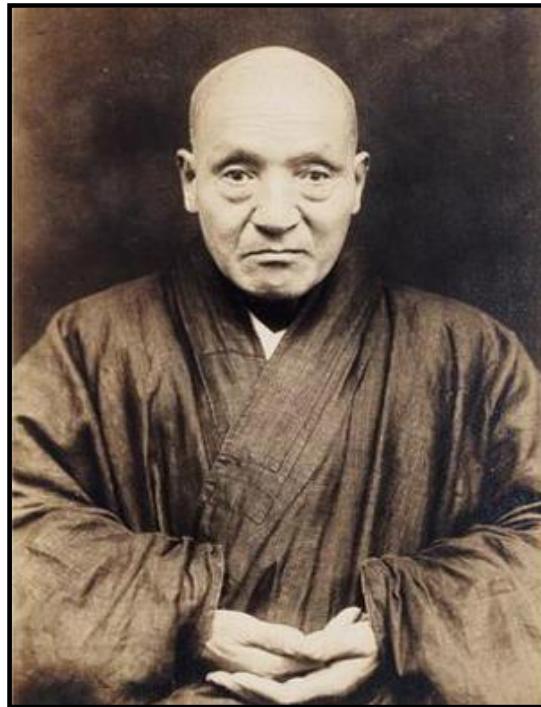
Furthermore, People often admire knowledgeable, intellectual, sophisticated or well learned people. However, people with such traits are superficial and not profound ; the reason they frequently indulge in doubts, arrogance, debates or grand maxims is because they have not recovered their Buddha-nature. The simple illiterate who single-mindedly recites Namo Amitabha without doubt or attachment is actually the true epitome of the Mahayana ideal. Such people will soon become omniscient Buddhas. Hence, single-minded faith in Amitabha, born from selfless virtue, is the most profound wisdom that ever was and will be.

Willingness: Those who have faith in Amitabha have planted roots of virtue with innumerable Buddhas in lives past. However, if coarse attachments to desire still grip them, they will fail to take advantage of the opportunity to attain Bodhi within one life. Thus, it is important to let everything go and sincerely seek Bodhi.

Action: The truly sincere recite the name of Amita Buddha at all times. They resist all temptations, attachments and provocations, Moreover, they do not mix their cultivation with other practices. They recite either silently or loudly and are mindful of Amita Buddha even during their sleep and meal times. The meaning of single-mindedness is to unceasingly recite Amita Buddha ; wandering thoughts, intentions, desires and so forth are completely suppressed by the constant string of recitations. Except for Amita Buddha, there should be nothing else.

Perhaps no one could put it better than the great Master Yin Guang himself. In his famous Exhortation, he succinctly outlines what one must do in order to achieve rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss:

PATRIARCH YIN GUANG'S EXHORTATION



Patriarch Yin Guang (1861-1940)

"Whether we are laymen or among the robed and ordained, we must respect our superiors and show kindness to our subordinates. We must bear what others cannot bear and practice what others are too weak to cultivate. We must shoulder other's burdens and help everyone succeed in their cultivation."

"During solitary moments, we must self reflect and repent. However, we should never prattle about the mistakes or scandals of others."

"We must be mindful of Amita Buddha from dawn to dusk and dusk to dawn. It makes no difference whether we are undertaking great feats or engaged in mundane daily chores, we must unceasingly recite the Buddha's name."

"When we are reciting—whether loudly, quietly or silently—we must refrain from entertaining false and wandering thoughts. There should not be a single thought which is not the Buddha's name in our minds. If false and wandering thoughts arise, dispel them immediately."

"Always feel remorse and be penitent. Even if we are skilled in cultivation, we must be humble and regard our own abilities as inferior. Never should we indulge in superbia."

"Instead of prying into the affairs or feuds of others, we should focus on ordering our own house. Furthermore, we should see only the merits of others, and not their faults or evils."

"For humility's sake, we must consider everyone else to be exalted Bodhisattvas—but ourselves as mere mortals."

"Those who observe these instructions will definitely achieve rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss."

BUDDHISM IS NONE OTHER THAN CULTIVATING VIRTUE, DISCARDING VICES AND PURIFYING THE MIND.

NAMO AMITABHA!
NAMO AMITABHA!
NAMO AMITABHA!

One of the greatest obstacles to successfully reciting the Buddha's name is our habit of duality and blaming/seeking the external. According to Liao Fan's Four Lessons:

Master Yun-Gu said that Master Hui-Neng, the Sixth Patriarch of the Zen School taught, "All the fields of merit are within one's own heart. If one seeks from the true mind within, one can be in touch with all one wishes for"

This is why Patriarch Yin Guang stressed self reflection, humility, repentance and introspection in his Exhortation. We often blame others or external factors when things are unsatisfactory or do not go our way. However, the truth is that **whatever happens on the outside is just a reflection of the inside**. If we continue to look at the world with a heart of duality and egocentrism, our life and living environment will forever reflect the impurities of the false and wandering thoughts that plague our hearts and minds.

On the other hand, if we refrain from blaming others and instead repent, all that which is negative can be eradicated. It does not matter whether we are at fault or not, as long as negative situations such as hostility, misfortunes and deprivation occur, it is our fault as such things only materialize because we harbor impure wandering thoughts. For instance, if we are insulted for no reason, it is because we still have the roots of contempt in our heart. It is not the man delivering the insult that we should blame, it is

actually ourselves. **If we did not harbor contempt inside, the outside could not give rise to anything contemptuous.**

The Patriarch Huineng famously said that our self-nature is self sufficient and can generate myriads of forms, persons and images. Thus, if our self-nature has been restored to its original purity (i.e. Bodhi), we can see no evil and feel no suffering. For instance, the Buddha once revealed how he saw the world by tapping the ground with his leg—the land around him instantly changed to reflect the beauty of the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Thus, even though the Buddha lived the life of a homeless monk, he was actually in the Land of Ultimate Bliss the whole time due to his Non-abidance (no matter where he goes, he will always be among the bliss of Pureland). As the common people around him were not enlightened, they only saw the Buddha living what appeared to be an uncomfortable life. This is because they saw only through their own lens, which were tainted by duality, greed, hatred and delusion. The brilliance of their self-nature was obstructed by karmic obstacles.

Thus, from this we can understand that a pure and virtuous heart gives rise to a pure world while passions give rise only to discomfort, dirtiness, pains, enemies and so forth. Life is like a movie that we direct. As duality is a delusion, all the people we meet in our life are actually just disinterested actors and actresses acting out a script we have written in a film set we have built. There are no other people, just our self-nature and the images it generates. So if we do not do good deeds, we write our own tragedy ; if we accord with Heaven's will and cultivate pure and kind thoughts, we write our own happy ending. In fact, the Shurangama Sutra even points out that if two populations of vastly different karma and mental purity were to gaze at the same sky, the virtuous ones will see only beauty while the sinful ones would see various bad omens. Therefore, by constantly reciting Amita Buddha's name, we can eliminate our karmic obstacles and achieve Buddhahood in Pureland—restoring our self-nature to its original purity.

As it is clear that our heart determines our environment, we should never blame others or harbor anger. Whenever anything negative happens, we should feel contrition for harboring impure thoughts and repent our past evil karma by reciting Amita Buddha's name with equanimity. **If you do so, you will find that many bad situations will suddenly resolve by itself.** This is because sincerity and modesty allows us to conform with our pure, boundlessly compassionate and omnipotent Buddha-nature. On the other hand, hatred and duality ties us to the wandering thoughts that shackle us to an illusory world of evil and volatile reflections.

For instance, a mother once asked a Sage to cure her son of cancer. The Sage said that her son was not in fact sick, the illness was actually in her heart. She later cleared her heart of hatred, greed and delusion by repenting and chanting the Buddha's name. Soon afterwards, her son recovered completely. From this, **we must understand that the outside is merely a mirror that reflects our heart.** If we are sick or see others suffering, it is because our heart harbors impure wandering thoughts based on greed, hatred and delusion. No one is to blame but ourselves.

Thus, if we recite the Buddha's name and the results are not efficacious, it is because we still harbor a blatantly egocentric, blame shifting and unrepentant mentality. In other words, our mouths may recite the Buddha's name but our hearts are not whole heartedly with the Buddha or Patriarch Yin Guang's instructions.

The same goes for larger events such as disasters, wars, oppression, rioting, earthquakes and so forth. For instance, faithlessness towards proper teachings (i.e. Buddhism, Christianity etc.) leads to unstable ground and greed leads to floods. If we wish to avoid such disasters, we must purify our hearts and rectify our actions. Our mind and body must conform with faith, temperance, forgiveness, kindness and charity. The world we live in is nothing than a mirror that reflects the various grades of delusions we harbor. If we have no delusions (i.e. attained Buddhahood), we would see only the brightness and bliss of our original self nature.

For instance, a Taiwanese woman once complained about the mismanagement of the economy at the hands of the government. A Sage overheard her complaints and told her that the state of the economy was actually her fault and not the government's. He told her that the roots of greed in her heart were generating the images of economic strife that she was seeing. If she purified her heart with repentance and mindfulness, her environment would change into that of abundance!

Ordinary people often blame God, Heaven, nature, animals, bad luck, other people and so forth for whatever does not go their way. However, the wise and sagely understand the following wisdom from Liao Fan's Four Lessons:

“Destiny exists but is difficult to be believed by most people because it is very changeable”. “Destiny is not set, but is only created and determined by ourselves”. These are all true. I came to understand that both good fortune and misfortune are incurred by our own actions. These are truly the words of sages and virtuous people! If one were to say that good fortune and adversity are all determined by the heavens,

then I would consider that person to be ordinary.

Hence, the wise take control of their own lives by self reflection and constant repentance through sincere recitation of Amita Buddha's name. Once their hearts become pure enough, they can see Amita Buddha and be reborn in Pureland. Their environment now reflects the exalted purity of Amita Buddha and Non-abidance.

Moreover, the Patriarch also cautions us against arrogance. Arrogance or pride is a common turbid state that taints our cultivation and attracts the attention of demons. For instance, some people may see spirits or other ethereal signs while they are cultivating mindfulness of Amita Buddha, this is because such people have a more profound spiritual nature. However, if we experience these signs and become overly confident or proud, we will fall into the habit of arrogance. The only goal of Amita Buddha Pureland Buddhism is to diligently recite until rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss is attained. Any ethereal phenomenon, any sign and any attainment before we meet Amita Buddha are of no importance. For instance, the Shurangama Sutra ends its description of each of the 50 Demonic States with the following advice:

It is a temporary state and does not indicate Sagehood. If he does not think he has become a Sage, then this will be a good state. But if he considers himself a sage, then he will be vulnerable to the demons' influence."

Thus, by disregarding every distraction, we will attain rebirth in Pureland unhindered. However, by becoming arrogant over false or petty attainments, we lose our sincerity and will fall. As Amita Buddha's 48 Vows and blessings provide cultivator's with unrivaled security against demonic influences and wrong views, all that is required to succeed is modesty and single-mindedness on our part. According to the Ven. Master Chin Kung, demons, delusions and wrong views cannot touch or sway those who are resolute in seeking rebirth in Pureland.

Furthermore, the reason many people cannot cultivate mindfulness of Amitabha to a profound degree is because of emotion and attachments. They are held back from Pureland by their passions and attachments. The only way to eliminate such obstacles is to understand that the world is impermanent and cannot be kept:

"People of this world all hanker after matters of little importance. Thus, they must toil and slog under an oppressive atmosphere of evil and suffering. Whether rich or poor, patrician or plebeian, young or old, male or female, they are all worried about

the future and tormented by the past. Shackled by desire, they cannot rest. For instance, those without dwellings yearn for them while those without land wish for it. All seek to gain or retain wealth, family and servants. If they have one they feel they lack the other. These people of feeble merit are forever afflicted. If they should by some chance amass all that they wish for, impermanence will visit them in the form of wars, disasters, bandits, creditors, extortionary governments and karmic enemies. Overwhelmed by sorrow over their losses, they become consumed by obstinate loathing. Unable to let go, all that they care for are torn from them upon their deaths anyway. This causes them to suffer ceaseless pain and anxiety. Such misery does not discriminate between aristocrats and paupers."

"Look around you, fathers inevitably shed tears for their deceased offspring while children weep over their late parents. Siblings and couples all become grief stricken when the one they love is lost. They do not know that their attachments are false and impermanent. Consumed by love and emotion, they are shackled to the Samsara. Consequently, they squander their years and neglect to diligently and properly cultivate the Dharma. Few become Sages while many drown in their own delusions."

- *Infinite Life Sutra*

Thus, why must we suffer the hells, ghost realms, animal realms as well as misfortune, loss and impermanence over passions and things that are not real? Why must we be chained to the Samsara for eons without end over things that we cannot keep, beauty that slips away like water in joined palms, affections we cannot retain, matters we cannot control, hatreds we cannot eliminate and bland dreams that mostly remain unfulfilled anyway? Why cling to a nightmare of birth, death, illness, impermanence and weary cycles? Why not single-mindedly seek Bodhi in Pureland and live forever in the Land of Ultimate Bliss?

For instance, as mentioned previously, the reason people are reborn together as family is due to past karmic debts and credits. For example, if a man owes someone a favor for kindness shown in past lives, he will likely be reborn as a loving spouse or parent to the person he owes kindness to. Likewise, if someone owes another money, the creditor will most likely be reborn as the debtor's offspring and heir. **Once the debt or favor has been repaid, the relationship naturally ends and any remaining affection usually disappears as new karmic relationships manifest. Thus, there really is nothing to be attached to.**

This is not to say that we should disregard our obligations towards our family, it

simply means that we should not be emotional. Filial piety is a virtue that mindfulness is built on, and no virtue can be successfully observed with emotionalism.

Furthermore, as every one of us have been turning in the Samsara since time immemorial, all of the innumerable sentient beings in the universe have at some point been our family members. Hence, we should cultivate the true compassion of Bodhisattvas while shedding the false emotional partialities rooted in the three poisons. For instance, if we achieve Bodhi, countless generations of our family (including those of prior rebirths) will share our merits and become devas or Sages.

Moreover, to understand in detail what the standard of single-mindedness calls for, we should look no further than the following:

**MAHASTHAMAPRAPTA'S TREATISE ON PERFECT
ENLIGHTENMENT THROUGH MINDFULNESS OF AMITAYUS**

As Mahasthamaprapta, a Prince of Dharma, arose from his seat, the 52 Bodhisattvas who formed his august retinue immediately followed suit. He and his retinue proceeded to reverently prostrate before the Buddha. His Serene Highness then spoke the following to the assembly:

"In a time before time immemorial, a Buddha titled Infinite Light appeared in this world. He was the first of twelve Buddhas who emerged in the that kalpa. The last one was a Buddha whose glorious light outshined the majestic brightness of both the Sun and the Moon. Thus, he was known as the Brightness Upon the Sun and the Moon Buddha."

"That Buddha personally taught me the Mindfulness of Amitayus Samadhi. For example, if a father who adores his son should have a son who does not requite, then the son's back will always be turned on his father. However, if both father and son were to yearn for each other, and if they unceasingly cherish thoughts of each other, then not even death could separate them. They will be together for life after life like a shadow following the form. The Buddhas of the ten quarters are like the father. They constantly show tender concern towards sentient beings who rarely requite. If those sentient beings could instead single-mindedly hold the Buddha's name, they will surely meet the Buddha. The Buddha's hands are always extended, but it is up to you to grasp it."

"Furthermore, if a man were to habitually burn scented incense, his person will naturally exude fragrant aromas. Likewise, a man who is mindful of the Buddha's

name will be adorned with the Buddha's infinite light and merit. Hence, it was through such mindfulness that I gained insight into the fact that all dharmas neither arise nor cease. Today in this world, I tirelessly exhort all to faithfully practice the Dharma-door of Pure Land. There is no better way to attain Perfect Enlightenment and the state of no outflows than by pure and unceasing mindfulness of Amitayus. Such Samadhi is the foremost."

This treatise, which is the last paragraph of Chapter 5 of the Shurangama Sutra, was inducted as the fifth principle text of Pureland Buddhism by Patriarch Yin Guang during the early 20th century. In fact, it was later determined after Master Yin Guang's passing that he was actually Mahasthamaprapta manifesting in human form! Therefore, this treatise represents the Buddha's timely gift of Dharma to us all. It is also the most important part of the Shurangama Sutra.

In this treatise, Mahasthamaprapta concisely explains the mechanics behind single-mindedly reciting Amita Buddha's name. The example of the father and the son is a masterful choice of words as it explains the level of devotion required in a way that most people can relate to. **If we (i.e. the son) can yearn for the Buddha (i.e. the father) as strongly as a loving father adores his child, we will certainly achieve single-mindedness.** Once single-mindedness is achieved, the terms of the treatise are fulfilled and one immediately becomes a Bodhisattva of Pureland.

Lastly, to conclude this section, Chapter 38 of Upasaka Xia's Infinite Life Sutra, the chapter where the Buddha used his transcendental powers to reveal Amita Buddha to Ananda and the congregation, is included below:

CHAPTER 38: PURELAND SHOWN TO CONGREGATION

The Buddha said to Ananda: "If you wish to witness the Buddha of Infinite Purity, Equality and Wisdom as well as the attendant lands of Bodhisattvas and Sages, then sincerely prostrate towards the west and single-mindedly recite Namo Amita Buddha."

Ananda quickly arose from his seat, joined his palms and faced the west. He prostrated and declared: "Today, I wish to see the Land of Ultimate Bliss and Amita Buddha—to revere, make offerings and cultivate roots of virtue!"

At that time, Amita Buddha appeared in full view. His body was vast and august ;

his countenance regal and upright. Like a golden colossus rising from the sea, his enormous and majestic form rapidly eclipsed the entire universe of countless world-systems. In addition, the Buddhas of the ten directions all became visible as well. The multitudes of Buddhas were seen ceaselessly praising and admiring Amita Buddha's numerous virtues and merits.

The Venerable Ananda said: "The Land of Ultimate of Bliss is a place like none other! I have already sought and attained rebirth there —I am now a Bodhisattva of Pureland."

The Buddha replied: "Those who attain rebirth there have met countless Buddhas in their past lives. They have also accrued abundant stocks of merit. If you wish to reach the Land of Ultimate Bliss, you must single-mindedly take refuge in Amita Buddha."

As the Buddha spoke, Amita Buddha let out a supreme and infinite light from his palms. This light instantly enveloped all of the innumerable world-systems belonging to the multitudes of Buddhas, making them plainly visible to the assembly. Every single detail of those worlds— such as the Adamantine Mountains, snowy peaks, whitewater rivers, dense forests and celestial vimanas—became clearly visible to everyone due to Amita Buddha's pure and glorious light. Akin to sunlight illuminating the Earth. Even the dismal realms of the ghouls, hell beings and animals were visible under Amita's golden light. His aurulent colored brightness filled up the entire universe like a great flood consuming the world. Needless to say, the radiance of a Buddha naturally outshines the halos of Bodhisattvas and Shravakas.

The monks, nuns, upasakas, upasikas, devas, celestial dragons, yakshas, asuras, kinnaras, mahoragas, gandharvas, garudas, humans and non humans that formed the Buddha's congregation all witnessed the magnificent and august splendors of the Land of Ultimate Bliss with their own eyes. They also saw Amita Buddha in his jeweled Pavilion ; he was seated upon an ornate settee composed of fragrant lotuses. His upright appearance naturally exuded virtues and radiated merits. Moreover, Sages and Bodhisattvas could be seen reverently attending to him. He was like the King of Mount Sumeru, a pure and shining beacon surrounded by the calm and meritorious waters of the vast ocean. Untainted by anything strange, evil or impure but adorned with countless treasures and surrounded by Sages.

Ananda and those present were so jubilant that they proceeded to prostrate before Amita Buddha with their heads touching the ground. Sincerely, everyone recited Namo Amita Samyaksambuddha. The multitudes of men, devas and even the little insects all benefited greatly as Amita Buddha's light shrouded them. All of their sufferings, anxieties and afflictions ceased completely at that moment—swiftly replaced by bliss and compassion.

Devas promptly made wonderful offerings of celestial bliss. With elegance and poise, they masterfully played their heavenly mandolins, clarinets, harps and clavichords. The atmosphere soon resounded with exquisite and ethereal music. Moreover, multitudes of gods and goddesses were seen scattering fragrant incense and flowers across the skies out of awe and veneration.

Due to the limitless powers of the Buddha, a land hundreds of thousands of kotis of nayutas away was seen in plain sight on the Saha world. Those who have the Buddha-Eye can still witness this sermon and scene in a future time.

The most important aspect of this Chapter is that it proves the Rebirth Upon Ten Recitations Vow and illustrates the vow in action. Everyone in that congregation yearned for Pureland rebirth, thus, the Buddha told them to single-mindedly seek rebirth in Pureland. They did so and instantly met Amita Buddha, becoming Mahabodhisattvas in the process. For instance, Ananda was only a Sotapanna at the beginning of this chapter but became a Bodhisattva of Pureland the instant he took refuge in Amita Buddha. Such exalted fruits arose due to nothing more than a moment of genuine faith in Amita Buddha.

In the Theravada scriptures, Ananda only became an Arhat after the Buddha's parinirvana. However, the truth is that he was already a Bodhisattva of Pureland. He was simply putting on the show of attaining Arhatship later on to help those who were not ready for the Mahayana teachings. The Mahayana sutras were spoken by the Buddha in Samadhi and stored in the minds of Bodhisattvas until they were recorded. Thus, the view that the Mahayana Sutras were not directly spoken by the Buddha is wrong and false. Both the Theravada and Mahayana teachings were spoken by the Buddha.

Thus, we must not delay our cultivation of Amita Buddha mindfulness. This is our one chance to speedily achieve Bodhi in this turbid world. The Venerable Master Chin Kung often warns us: *"This is our only chance, a rare breach in the opaque walls of the Samsara, whence come another?"*

Recommended Resources:

Going Home to the Pure Land

Venerable Master Wu Ling

<https://archive.org/details/purelandhome/v1>

This excellent book provides detailed instructions on how to integrate mindfulness of Amita Buddha into your daily life. It also teaches techniques for Buddha name recitation.

Ven. Master Hai Xian Pureland Rebirth Biographic Documentary (English Subtitles)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoritpHKxm4>

Ven. Master Hai Xian (1901-2013) achieved Pureland rebirth during the wee hours of January 17th 2013. The Venerable Master Chin Kung has said that he is the new Patriarch Huineng and that his life of cultivation will serve as a beacon of light for thousands of years to come. Hence, all are recommended to watch this documentary.

HOW TO HELP THE DEAD AND DYING

There is a popular Taoist/Confucian saying that goes: **Few since ancient times have managed to live to seventy, yet the roads are littered with the penniless who have sold everything to buy medicine!**

This maxim is particularly important in our day and age. Nowadays, people often neglect to prepare for their inevitable death and rebirth but fight tooth and nail to squeeze out a few more years of life. For instance, many parents will often spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to save a terminally ill child. However, the same parents would most likely neglect to cultivate merits on the child's behalf.

Unfortunately, most people only weep when the one they love is lost. Moreover, relatives often spend large amounts of money on expensive funerals to show respect. However, grieving and splurging are of no help whatsoever for the soul of the deceased. In fact, if animals are slaughtered as sacrifices or for the purpose of serving meat during the memorial ceremony (a common occurrence across the world), that would actually add to the karmic burdens of the deceased!

Thus, everyone must heed and propagate the teachings found in Chapter 7 (Benefiting the Living and the Dead) of the Earth Store Sutra (translated by the BTTS) :

At that time, Earth Store Bodhisattva Mahasattva said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, I see that every single movement or stirring of thought on the part of beings of Jambudvipa is an offense. Beings tend to use up any wholesome benefits they accrue, and many of them end up retreating from their initial resolve. If they encounter evil conditions, they magnify them with every thought. They are like people trying to carry heavy rocks while walking through mud. Each step becomes more difficult and the rocks more cumbersome as their feet sink deeper. If they meet a mentor, he may be strong enough to lighten or even totally remove their burdens. Helping them thus, the mentor will then advise them to stay on solid ground and be mindful never to go back into that treacherous path.

“World Honored One, the bad habits of beings range from minor to major. Since all beings have such habits, their families or relatives should create blessings for them when they are on the verge of dying in order to assist them on the road ahead. That may be done by hanging banners and canopies; lighting oil lamps; reciting the sacred sutras; and making offerings before the images of Buddhas or sages. Another way to assist them is by reciting the names of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and

Pratyekabuddhas so that the recitation of each name passes by the ear of the dying one and is heard in his fundamental consciousness.

“Suppose the evil karma created by beings were such that they ought to fall into the bad destinies. If their relatives cultivate wholesome causes on their behalf when they are close to death, then their manifold offenses can be dissolved. If relatives can further do many good deeds during the first forty-nine days after the death of such beings, then the deceased can leave the evil destinies forever, be born as humans and gods, and receive supremely wonderful bliss. Their surviving relatives will also receive limitless benefits.

“Therefore, before the Buddhas, World Honored Ones, as well as before the gods, dragons, and the rest of the eightfold division, humans and non-humans, I now exhort beings of Jambudvipa to be careful to avoid harming, killing, and doing other unwholesome deeds; to refrain from worshipping ghosts and spirits or making sacrifices to them; and never to call on mountain sprites on the day of death. Why is that? Killing, harming, and making sacrifices do not even have a tiny hairbreath of power with which to benefit the deceased. Such acts only bind up the conditions of offenses so that they grow ever deeper and heavier. The deceased might have been due to increase his potential for sagehood or gain birth among humans or gods in his next life or in the future.

“But if his family commits offenses in his name, his good rebirth will be delayed. How much more would that be the case for people on the verge of death who during their lives had failed to plant even a few good roots. Each offender has to undergo the bad destinies according to his own karma. How could anyone bear to have relatives add to that karma? That would be like having a neighbor add a few more things to a load of over a hundred pounds being carried by someone who had already traveled a long distance and who had not eaten for three days. If that extra weight were added, that person’s burden would become even more unbearable.

“World Honored One, I see that beings of Jambudvipa will themselves receive the benefit of any good deeds they are able to do that accord with the Buddha’s teachings. That holds true even when the deeds are as small as a strand of hair, a drop of water, a grain of sand, or a mote of dust.”

After that had been said, an elder named Great Eloquence rose in the assembly. He had realized Non-Production long ago and was appearing in the body of an elder only to teach and transform those in the Ten Directions. Putting his palms together

respectfully, he asked Earth Store Bodhisattva, “Great Lord, after people in Jambudvipa die and their close and distant relatives cultivate merit by making vegetarian meal offerings and doing other such good deeds, will the deceased obtain merit and virtue significant enough to bring about their liberation?”

Earth Store replied, “Elder, based on the awesome power of the Buddhas, I will now expound this principle for the sake of beings of the present and future. Elder, if beings of the present and future when on the verge of dying hear the name of one Buddha, one Bodhisattva, or one Pratyekabuddha, they will attain liberation whether they have committed offenses or not.

“When men or women laden with offenses who failed to plant good causes die, even they can receive one-seventh of any merit dedicated to them by relatives who do good deeds on their behalf. The other six-sevenths of the merit will return to the living relatives who did the good deeds. It follows that good men and women of the present and future who cultivate while they are strong and healthy will receive all of the benefit derived.

“The arrival of the Great Ghost of Impermanence is so unexpected that the deceased ones’ consciousnesses first roam in darkness and obscurity, unaware of offenses and blessings. For forty-nine days the deceased are as if deluded or deaf, or as if in courts where their karmic retributions are being decided. Once judgment is fixed, they are reborn according to their karma. In the time before rebirths are determined, the deceased suffer from thousands upon thousands of anxieties. How much more is that the case for those who are to fall into the bad destinies.

“Throughout forty-nine days, those whose lives have ended and who have not yet been reborn will be hoping every moment that their immediate relatives will earn blessings powerful enough to rescue them. At the end of that time, the deceased will undergo retribution according to their karma. If someone is an offender, he may pass through hundreds of thousands of years without even a day’s liberation. If someone’s offenses deserve Fivefold Relentless Retribution, he will fall into the great hells and undergo incessant suffering throughout hundreds of millions of eons.

“Moreover, Elder, when beings who have committed karmic offenses die, their relatives may prepare vegetarian offerings to aid them on their karmic paths. In the

process of preparing the vegetarian meal and before it has been eaten, rice-washing water and vegetable leaves should not be thrown on the ground.

Note: According to the Venerable Master Chin Kung: In order to demonstrate utmost sincerity, the water used to wash the rice and the bits of vegetable that are not used should be placed in bowls and left on the side. They should not be thrown away until after the ceremony is finished.

Before the food is offered to the Buddhas and the Sangha, no one should eat it. If there is laxness or transgression in this matter, then the deceased will receive no strength from it, but if purity is rigorously maintained in making the offering to the Buddhas and the Sangha, the deceased will receive one seventh of the merit. Therefore, Elder, by performing vegetarian offerings on behalf of deceased fathers, mothers, and other relatives while making earnest supplication on their behalf, beings of Jambudvipa benefit both the living and the dead.”

Moreover, the moment of death is also a critical moment that if used correctly, will result in rebirth in Pureland. For even a person who has never heard of Pureland teachings can achieve rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss if they become sincerely mindful of Amita Buddha during their last thought.

Thus, this is the reason why we need to recite the name of Amita Buddha to the dead and dying. Even if a person has died, it is likely that the consciousness has not yet left the body (it usually leaves 8-12 hours later). Hence, it is important to **not disturb the body and to recite Amita Buddha's name to them during this time**. This will allow their consciousness to remain calm and become mindful of the Buddha. Furthermore, the 26th Vow of Amita Buddha also states that those who merely perceive his name will have a splendid rebirth even if they do not leave the Samsara. As a person's hearing is actually the last faculty to fail, their consciousness can still hear for the full 8-12 hour period after their breathing stops.

Lastly, even in the worse case scenario, such as if the 49 day period has long passed before these teachings were encountered by relatives, transference of merit will still help regardless of where the deceased has been reborn or how much time has passed. The merits from good deeds dedicated to someone else will always be able to instantly find its way across the Samsara to the intended recipient. **For instance, if we regularly make offerings (e.g. incense, flowers or water etc.) to an image of Earth Store Bodhisattva, all of our forefathers and ancestors will achieve heavenly rebirth and the lives of our living parents will be greatly prolonged.**

To conclude this section, the excellent example of Dr. Chiang is included:

The Story of Dr Chiang

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A talk by Alice Chiang on September 14, 2008

Dharma Master Yo asked me to share with you what Dr. Chiang and our family have gone through these past 5 months. Life is so very unpredictable! Just a few months ago, Dr. Chiang was at the peak of his medical practice. We were in the process of moving into a brand new house. It was his dream home. It's got everything he ever wanted built in it. The new house was surrounded by woods and lots of trees, which he loved. He was very excited about it. At the end of February and the beginning of March, we began to pack our valuables and important documents into boxes and move from our old house to the new one. His back then began to hurt. We thought he probably just pulled some muscles while lifting boxes and did not take too much notice of it. Well, the back pain got worse for the next two weeks and began to pinch the nerve, causing numbness of the left leg. He decided to get an MRI of the spine to make sure everything was okay.

I will never forget March 20th, Thursday, at 3 p.m. [Our son] Andy was still on his spring break. We all accompanied Dr. Chiang to have the MRI. As he came out of the test, he was wearing a smile on his face. Andy and I were relieved. But he then went on and told us that the radiologist had shown him the film, and he had seen a large tumor inside one of the vertebrae. Subsequently, a CT Scan confirmed that Dr. Chiang had stage IV lung cancer, which had already spread to the spine. It was so shocking and devastating for me! I didn't know what to do. The first thing that came to my mind was: what's going to happen to all his patients? Who would be willing to cover for Dr. Chiang? And what's going to happen to his medical practice that he cares so very much about? Coincidentally, March 20th was also the day that we had just signed the contract to list our old house for sale.

Even though Dr. Chiang was ailing, he went back to the office over the next two days, performed 15 endoscopies and colonoscopies, and saw 25 patients. He was still laughing and joking with the patients as if nothing had happened. But starting Sunday, three days after he was diagnosed, his condition continued deteriorating. He was in so much pain and couldn't get out of bed any more. After that, he was never able to go back to his office ever again. Taking care of Dr. Chiang and bringing him to various

tests/scans and treatment/therapy was already a full time job for me. But being his medical practice manager, I had to handle the transition of the patient care as well as the business and operation of the office, including finding a good physician to cover for Dr. Chiang as well as coordinating with pharmacies and other health care professionals. In addition, I had to deal with selling the old house and eventually moving. To me, it was almost mission impossible! It was a tremendous and overwhelming burden for me. Being a Buddhist, it is very clear to me that this was karmic retribution appearing right in front of us. We were in this together. These karmic situations came chasing us like a huge hurricane and totally caught us off guard! I know this was the karma from Dr. Chiang's previous life, because in this life he was such a good, kindhearted man who had saved so many people's lives. So, I began to repent to the Buddha on Dr. Chiang's behalf and recite the Great Compassion Mantra vigorously, incorporating the recitation into my daily activities all day long. I know I was being blessed by Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Venerable Master Hua because in addition to the Dharma Masters' caring and support, all of a sudden I felt an enormous and irresistible power and strength in me at all times helping me overcome so many karmic obstacles.

Recently, Dr. Chiang did back surgery to remove the tumor in the vertebrae, four sessions of chemotherapy, and over 30 sessions of radiation treatment, yet the cancer cells continued to grow and to spread! I made many attempts to share the Buddhadharma with him using my own experience as an example. I also urged him to accept some alternative medicine and food therapy for body and mind healing, but I could never totally convince him. Being not only a physician but also biochemist and immunologist himself, Dr. Chiang was very skeptical of my advice.

In mid-July, Dr. Chiang was admitted to the hospital due to side effects from chemotherapy. He couldn't keep any food down and was constantly throwing up. His condition started gradually going downhill. A week later, his arms and legs were all swollen, and he lost his voice. The oncologist told us that it was about the time to put his hands in his pockets, as there was nothing he could do medically to help Dr. Chiang. When we were told Dr. Chiang only had weeks to live, he was surprisingly very calm. This was when I told him that only Buddhas and Bodhisattvas could save him now. I asked him to begin vigorously reciting Amitabha's name, and explained to him that the land of Ultimate Bliss is covered by gold and surrounded by so many treasures and that there will be no suffering, only enjoyment of every bliss. If he recited Amitabha's name wholeheartedly, he would attain rebirth in the land of Ultimate Bliss. He agreed and began to do so. I told him that if he recited the

Buddha's name one time, he would liberate one cancer cell; if he recited 10,000 times, he'd liberate 10,000 cancer cells. He laughed. I went on and told him to recite with as much diligence as if his patients were very sick, and he needed to save their lives. He listened and acknowledged my words. He also took Dharma Master Yo's advice and agreed to take refuge with the Triple Jewel and receive the Five Precepts.

On July 27th, Dharma Master Yo and Dharma Master Jai along with disciple Kao came to visit Dr. Chiang in the hospital. Dr. Chiang took refuge with Venerable Master Hua and received the five precepts from Dharma Master Yo and Dharma Master Jai. Inconceivably, the very next day, the swelling of his arms and legs diminished! He looked so much healthier with pink cheeks. Not only did he begin to talk out loud but also he was able to start eating and keep the food down without vomiting! The oncologist was so stunned and amazed and couldn't figure out why. This gave Dr. Chiang so much confidence and encouragement. All of sudden, he was able to totally let go of his worries and be totally at ease. After that, he began reciting Buddha's name even more vigorously.

As we were thinking Dr. Chiang was stable enough to come home, he started to develop difficulty in breathing. His heart was pounding very fast. Coughing and fever complicated the condition. I knew the end was coming. Andy and I followed the Dharma Master's suggestion to recite along with him. A few times when I asked him whether he saw Amitabha coming, he nodded his head and said, "Yes!" Right before and after Dr. Chiang's passing, we did encounter a few incidences of interference from creditors of Dr. Chiang's previous lives. Andy will briefly describe what happened during and after Dr. Chiang's passing later. Although Dr. Chiang was seeking help of the Buddha at the very last minutes, he did have good roots, blessings, virtues, and causal connections as described in The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra, and he was reciting Buddha's name so vigorously and wholeheartedly without confusion. Therefore, I believe he will attain rebirth in Amitabha's land of Ultimate Bliss.

In his Dharma Talks, Venerable Master Hua often spoke of how sincerity brings a response that intertwines with the Way. It is truly an inconceivable phenomenon. I myself have felt and witnessed Buddhas and Bodhisattvas' compassion, wisdom, and boundless light shining on me during this most difficult time of my life. I would like to share a phrase with you which best describes what I went through during the past five months. The phrase is from Incense Praise: "If our hearts are sincere and earnest, all Buddhas will manifest."

A talk by Andy Chiang on September 14, 2008

My dad passed away on Saturday, August 16th, in the afternoon. Heading into that Thursday, August 14th, we knew that my dad was probably nearing the end of his life, so Mom and I made sure that we were in my dad's hospital room at all times. Around 3 p.m. on Friday, my mom and I had an appointment at the funeral home to discuss the arrangement. But pretty much right as we got back to the hospital from the funeral home around 6 p.m., my mom received a call from our home's security company. They called to tell us that the alarm system had gone off at home and to see if we were okay. Naturally, my mom told them that we hadn't been in the house since 2 p.m.; Therefore, it was really strange that the alarm went off around 6 p.m. ; This was the first time our alarm had ever gone off, so my mom was afraid someone had broken into our house. We decided to rush back home to make sure things were okay. We waited for two police cars to show up. When we opened the garage door, we noticed that the rear door to the house was open. The police went in the house and checked every room and found no trace of anyone breaking in. When we were confident that our home was fine, my mom and I rushed back to the hospital to be with my dad.

That night we were reciting the Amitabha Buddha's name all night long. When dad was listening to us reciting the Buddha's name, he would move his lips trying so hard to recite with us and often breaking into huge smiles. These smiles were different than his usual smiles--as if he were experiencing something he'd never experienced before. And indeed, when my mom asked him, "Did you see the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas?" he nodded to say yes. The next day, on the morning of the day that my dad passed away, he could not really move anything but his eyes. As we recited the Amitabha Buddha's name to him, I saw tears coming down from his eyes. That's how I knew he could hear me. So I was reciting even louder and more vigorously, because I knew the end was near.

My dad passed away that Saturday afternoon at 2:22 p.m. But just a few minutes before and after dad's passing, something very strange was happening. The intercom speaker kept coming on (at least three times), and the front desk nurse kept asking us, "How can I help you?" even though no one had pressed the emergency button. In fact, I had gotten so annoyed by it that I left my dad's room to go tell the front desk that we were trying to recite the Amitabha Buddha's name, and the intercom speaker kept distracting us. At 2:30 p.m., my mom asked the nurse to come in and unplug the IV machine. When dad passed away, his face froze in the suffering state he was in when he took his last breath. Our heartfelt thanks to so many of you who came to the

hospital to help us recite Amitabha Buddha's name. After several hours of recitation, my dad's face began to change, even though he had died hours earlier. The suffering state of his mouth changed into a decidedly noticeable smile. It was unmistakable! I was in absolute shock and awe at what I had seen. A little after 10 p.m. towards the end of the recitation of the Amitabha prayer, all of a sudden, the unplugged IV machine started beeping again as if it were on, for a few times in a row! (But it had been turned off for almost eight hours by that point!).

The next day, when I finally had a chance to think about all the incredible things that happened in the last two days, and I had a chance to talk to my mom about it, I was then able to make sense of everything. The rear door opening by itself, the hospital intercom speaker going off by itself, and the IV beeping after it had been turned off... This was all the work of enemy spirits that were trying to distract my family and I from focusing our attention on my dad as he was about to die. I understood then that these spirits were from my dad's past lives and were trying to keep us away from my dad. I realized that the smile from my dad's face even after he passed away was his way of communicating to us that he had found Amitabha, through the light that our prayers had created for him and that he would find his way to the Pure Land. My dad's eyes had closed, but he opened mine. Thank you very much.

Amitabha!!

HOW TO COUNTER OCCULT INFLUENCES, NEUTRALIZE GRAVE ILLNESSES, ELIMINATE EVIL KARMA & SAVE YOURSELF DURING EMERGENCIES

As mentioned in the beginning of this book, the name of Guanyin Bodhisattva is a profound mantra of great potency and merit. Nowadays, people often meddle in forms of occult divination or séances, consequently attracting ghosts and spirits. Moreover, the lack of virtue (i.e. 5 precepts) in our age makes our bodies more yin than yang ; this is a vulnerability that malevolent ghosts and spirits can exploit. Furthermore, practitioners of deviant rituals, wrong views and occult mantras can easily corrupt the minds of those who do not have enough merit and virtue to protect themselves. Alarmingly, there are also many who would summon malicious spirits or cast evil spells and hexes for the right price.

For instance, according to the Shurangama Sutra:

"Ananda, why do I call collecting one's thoughts the precepts? If beings in the six paths of any mundane world had no sexual desire, they would not have to undergo a continual succession of births and deaths. Your basic purpose in cultivating Samadhi is to transcend the wearisome defilements. But if you do not renounce sexual desire, you will not be able to get out of the dust. Even though people may have some wisdom and the manifestation of Dhyana Samadhi, if they do not exterminate sexual desire, they are certain to enter demonic paths. At best, they will become demon kings; on the average, they will become members of the retinue of demons; at the lowest level, they will become female demons. These demons all have their groups of disciples. Each claims that he has accomplished the Unsurpassed Way. After my Nirvana, in the Dharma-ending Age, these hordes of demons will abound, spreading like wildfire as they openly practice greed and lust, while claiming to be Good Knowing Advisors. They will cause beings to fall into the pit of love and views and lose the way to Bodhi."

Thus, those who do not keep the precepts will more easily succumb to evil influences, ideas or spells. Unfortunately, our current era is the Dharma-ending age, a time where not only are people less virtuous but deviant teachers masquerading as good knowing advisors abound across the world.

Furthermore, many people today are afflicted by chronic conditions, cancer and incurable illnesses. Such conditions are the result of karmic retributions caused by the

spirits of karmic creditors. For instance, according to the Ven. Master Hsuan Hua:

The most urgent issue is that there are countless little ghosts in the world right now. Why are there so many little ghosts? Because there have been too many abortions. The fetuses are killed even before they have developed into a fully human form. The vengeance wreaked by little ghosts is very grave. Therefore, the injunction to liberate life and avoid killing includes not having abortions. It is not easy to get free of these little ghosts. As it's said, "King Yama is easy to meet; the little ghosts are hard to handle." Everyone should pay attention to this. In all the countries of the world right now, there is a greater abundance of little ghosts than big ghosts, and more big ghosts than old ghosts. It is a very serious problem.

Thus, the spirits of aborted babies often follow the mother or abortionist and cause trouble sooner or later. In cases of illness caused by ghosts and spirits, regular medicine will be of no avail.

Nevertheless, people who are troubled by such unhealthy occult influences, threatened by ghosts or experiencing other dangers and karmic retributions should heed the advice of Chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra (commonly referred to as the Universal Dharma-door of Guanyin Bodhisattva):

***World Honored One, complete with wondrous marks,
I now ask again,
Why is this disciple of the Buddha Called Guanshiyin?***

***The Honored One of Perfect, Wondrous Marks,
With verses answered Inexhaustible Intention:
Listen to the practice of Guanyin,
Who skillfully responds in all places.***

***With vast vows, as deep as the sea,
Throughout inconceivable eons,
He has served many thousands of kotis of Buddhas,
And has made great, pure vows.***

***I shall now tell you in brief,
That for those who hear his name or see him,***

*And who are mindful of his name unceasingly,
He can extinguish the suffering of all realms of existence.*

*If someone is the victim of another's harmful intent,
And is pushed into a pit of fire,
If he evokes the strength of Guanyin,
The pit of fire will turn into a pool.
If someone is being tossed about in the great sea,
And is surrounded by the dangers of dragons, fish, and ghosts,
If he evokes the strength of Guanyin,
The waves will not drown him.*

*If someone is on the peak of Mount Sumeru,
And another person tries to push him off,
If he evokes the strength of Guanyin,
He will stand firm as the sun in space.*

*If someone is pursued by evil people,
Who want to throw him off a Vajra Mountain,
If he evokes the strength of Guanyin,
Not a single hair on his body will be harmed.*

*If someone is surrounded by vicious bandits,
Who threaten him with knives,
If he evokes the strength of Guanyin,
The bandits will all give rise to compassion.*

*If someone is in trouble with the law,
And on the verge of being executed,
If he evokes the strength of Guanyin,
The knives will break into pieces.*

*If someone is imprisoned, shackled, or chained,
Or if his hands and feet are in stocks,
If he evokes the strength of Guanyin,
His bonds will open and he will be free.*

*If someone is about to be harmed,
By mantras, spells, or poison,*

*If he evokes the strength of Guanyin,
The harm will all return to the sender.*

*If someone meets with evil rakshasas,
Poisonous dragons, or ghosts,
If he evokes the strength of Guanyin,
They will then not dare to harm him.*

*If someone is surrounded by vicious beasts,
With fearsome fangs and claws,
If he evokes the strength of Guanyin,
The beasts will quickly run far away.*

*Poisonous snakes and scorpions,
Have blazing lethal vapors,
But if one evokes the strength of Guanyin,
At the sound of one's voice, they will disperse.*

*Clouds of roaring thunder and lightning
May send down hail or great floods of rain,
But if one evokes the strength of Guanyin,
The clouds will immediately scatter.*

*Living beings are beset with hardships,
And oppressed by limitless sufferings.
The power of Guanyin's wondrous wisdom
Can rescue the world from suffering.*

*Complete with the power of spiritual penetrations,
Vastly cultivating wisdom and expedient means,
Going throughout countries in the ten directions,
He manifests everywhere in all places.*

*The various evil destinies,
Those of the hells, ghosts, and animals,
And the pain of birth, old age, sickness, and death
Are all gradually wiped away.*

*True Contemplator, Pure Contemplator,
Contemplator with Vast, Great Wisdom,*

*Compassionate Contemplator, Kind Contemplator,
May we constantly behold you with reverence!*

*Unfiled pure light,
The sun of wisdom that breaks through the darkness
Is able to quell calamities of wind and fire
As it shines on all worlds.*

*Compassionate substance: the thunder of precepts.
Kind intent: a wondrous great cloud.
He rains down sweet dew and Dharma rain,
Which extinguish the flames of affliction.*

*In the midst of contention, when faced with lawsuits,
Or when someone is terrified on the battlefield,
If he evokes the strength of Guanyin,
All his many enemies will scatter and leave.
Wondrous your sound, Contemplator of the World's Sounds
A pure sound, a sound like the sea tide,
A sound beyond all worldly sounds,
We shall always bear it in mind.*

*In thought after thought we have no doubt:
Guanshiyin is pure and sagely.
In times of suffering, agony, danger, and death,
He is our refuge and protector.*

*Complete with all merit and virtue,
His kind eyes watching living beings,
He is endowed with massive blessings, limitless as the sea.
Therefore we should reverently worship him.*

The meaning of these verses (translated by the BTTS) is that the name of Guanyin Bodhisattva is a life saving mantra that can smash through any threat or danger. By sincerely reciting it, all evils and misfortunes will be wiped away by the power of the Bodhisattva's merits. Even those who have followed evil teachings and willfully broken the precepts can be saved from their karmic retributions and have their delusions turned into wisdom if they sincerely recite Guanyin Bodhisattva's name.

Furthermore, in Lao Tzu's Treatise on Response and Retribution, it is stressed that the virtuous do not damage even the little insects, flowers, trees and grasses. This is because destroying and disrespecting nature may attract the wrath of normally benign ghost and spirits.

For instance, before we cut down a tree that is taller than the average human, we should first declare our intention to the resident tree spirit and give at least three days notice. We should also amass merits in the Buddhadharma (e.g. recite Buddha names or mantras) and dedicate the merit to the tree spirit as compensation. If we do not, we might offend the a tree spirit of rank. Furthermore, the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua has stated that not all animals are animals. For instance, some bees are actually spirits who temporarily assume the form of bees to drink pollen. Additionally, even grasses and flowers are often the abodes of minor spirits. Hence, we should never indiscriminately kill insects or tread on grass.

Things which appear unassuming to the human eye often hold great significance to sentient beings in different dimensions. Hence, the greatest problem with people today is that they offend the spirits, destroy natural habitats and eat meat without measure. With such habits of negligence and self will, it becomes hard for them to cultivate the Dharma ; consequently, they focus on making others the victims of their greed, hatred and arrogance. A man without deference, virtue and humility will always be troubled by evil ghosts, wrong views, evil people and wild beasts.

Therefore, if we cultivate deference, virtue, respect and humility, we would never be troubled by occult influences, evil ghosts or karmic retributions etc. This is because virtue dissolves bad karma, eliminates wrong views and easefully deflects the yin energy of evil curses and spirits.

In addition, according to the Medicine Master Sutra (translated by the BTTS):

"Moreover, Manjushri, there may be beings who delight in perversity and engage in legal disputes, bringing trouble to others as well as themselves. In their actions, speech, and thoughts, they create ever-increasing amounts of evil karma. Never willing to benefit and forgive others, they scheme to harm one another instead. They pray to the spirits of the mountain forests, trees, and graves. They kill living beings in order to make sacrifices of blood and flesh to the yaksha and rakshasa ghosts. They write down the names of their enemies and make images of them, and then they hex those names and images with evil mantras. They summon paralysis

ghosts, cast hexes, or command corpse-raising ghosts to kill or injure their enemies.

However, if the victims hear the name of Medicine Master Vaidurya Light Tathagata, then all those evil things will lose their power to do harm. The evildoers will become kind to one another. They will attain benefit, peace, and happiness and no longer cherish thoughts of malice, affliction, or enmity. Everyone will rejoice and feel content with what they have. Instead of encroaching upon each other, they will seek to benefit one another."

Hence, if you feel affinity with the Medicine Master Buddha, reciting his name will work just as well as reciting the name of Guanyin Bodhisattva.

Lastly, the Ven. Master Chin Kung has stated that the reason a person is born to a particular set of parents is because of past life debts and hatreds. For example, if a person owed someone money in past lives or if he had wronged somebody in the past, it is highly likely that his victims would be reborn as his son or daughter to take revenge on him or squander his wealth. The best way to guard against such dangers is to practice natal moral education.

According to the wisdom of the Ancient Sages: **A child is already learning as soon as conception. Hence, a fetus can already feel the thoughts, actions and emotions of their parents.** If these thoughts and actions are negative, lustful, hateful and so forth, the child will grow up influenced by passion and their past hatreds will surface unhindered. However, if the parents can, during the pregnancy and early years of the child, conduct themselves in accordance with virtue, temperance, chastity, charity, filial piety and kindness, and if they also recite Buddha names, sutras or mantras and listen to Dharma talks, then any past life hatred can be neutralized and the child will grow up to become a Sage. Thus, first impressions are important.

However, if the children are already grown and causing trouble, then diligent accumulation of yin (i.e. selfless and unostentatious) merit can help resolve past life enmity between parent and child. According to Lord Superior Wen Chang's Tract of the Quiet Way, the merit accumulated by elders and parents will be enjoyed by their sons, daughters and grandchildren. Thus, by saving the roots, the leaves and berries will be saved as well.

THE THREE GREAT BENEFITS OF FORBEARANCE

By extinguishing a moment of anger, years of misfortune are avoided.

-The Ancient Sages

Power and authority should not be exercised to the maximum, blessings should not be abused and wealth should not be spent extravagantly.

-Jade Record

Generosity creates blessings and forbearance retains it.

-Ven. Master Chin Kung

There can be no wisdom without diligence and no diligence without patience.

-Ven. Master Chin Kung

Acceptance of losses and slights is the root of fortune ; contending invites only disasters.

-Traditional Chinese Maxim

Only lengthily journeys can gauge a horse's strength and endurance. Likewise, only long term undertakings can prove a man's devotion.

-Traditional Chinese Maxim

Those who are tolerant, patient and forgiving are not fools. However, those who are vindictive and selfish are fools.

-Traditional Chinese Maxim

If a veteran monk remains as enthusiastic about Bodhi as when he first joined the Sangha, he will become a Buddha very soon.

-Traditional Chinese Maxim

Nowadays, tempers flare easily and frustration is in the hearts of many. Few today understand the power of forbearance. According to the Infinite Life Sutra:

"People of this world are confused about good and evil. Their faith in the laws of karma are weak. Hence, they tenaciously cling to their own delusions. Being foolish, they reject the Dharma and embrace wrong and deviant views. Their upside-down ways trap them within the Samsara. As they seek only instant gratification, they are addicted to hatred and gripped by lust and avarice. Isn't that pitiable?!"

These words of wisdom should resonate deeply within us, for they clearly describe the mentality and values of most people in this world. As most people habitually indulge in their hatred and greed, they create the following harmful dilemma described in the same Sutra:

"When interacting with others, we must know that even a small disagreement now may escalate into a mass of enmity in the lives to come. Thus, we should be cautious. Those who antagonize and humiliate others will eventually be reborn together with their victims and suffer their vengeance."

Thus, most people casually create karmic seeds that result in future pain and enmity. The reason people cannot avoid such misery by keeping the precepts or diligently cultivating virtue is because they failed to exercise forbearance.

However, in this world full of temptations and provocations, it is understandable that people will indulge their passions. Short-sightedness is the main cause of this problem. Hence, the purpose of this section is to elaborate the top three profound benefits of patience, equanimity and forbearance.

1.) Boundless Merits

Forbearance prevents transgressions of the 5 precepts, allowing good karma to accrue and evil karma to be eradicated. The reason human rebirth is considered significant is because it offers a rare opportunity to make profound impacts on one's karmic situation with seemingly small acts.

For instance, by simply cultivating virtue, the Dharma and forbearance in this one short life, eons of past evil karma can be eradicated and hundreds of thousands of good rebirths can be obtained. According to the Diamond Sutra:

"Furthermore, Subhuti, if a virtuous man or woman, while reciting and practicing this sutra, is disdained or slandered, his or her misdeeds committed in past lives, including those that could bring about an evil destiny, will be eradicated, and he or she will attain the fruit of the most fulfilled, awakened mind."

Therefore, if a man recites the Diamond Sutra, and afterwards experiences slander or insults, it is actually a good sign. Because of the immense virtue and merit being amassed, that little bit of slander is actually eons of hellish rebirths being reduced to just a few unkind words. This is the profound principle of karma that few understand. Many people erroneously think that if some slight misfortune happens when they are doing good, then that must be because virtue is of no use. In fact, the opposite is true.

Furthermore, according to Upasaka Xia's Infinite Life Sutra:

"In fact, if you practice virtue in this world for ten full days, the merits derived will surpass that of cultivating elsewhere in the Samsara for a whole millennium. The reason is that the other worlds are naturally pleasurable due to the superior virtue and merit of their inhabitants. Thus, there are no grounds for committing evil. Conversely, the world we reside in has little good but plenty of evil. People here are harassed by scarcity and must toil for a living. In addition, the food and drink here are toxic and bitter. The evil habits of this world increases with each passing day."

What the Buddha is saying here is that our world is considerably more evil than most of the other worlds of the Samsara. Even our food is tainted with various chemicals and hormones. Thus, virtue and good deeds done in this world not only generates disproportionately large rewards, it also eradicates all evil karmas. Therefore, if we have no forbearance, we will accumulate only karmic obstacles during our life and squander this rare chance to change our future for the better.

Furthermore, it is stated in the Di Zi Gui (Standards on Being a Good Pupil and Child) that filial piety is easy when your parents are kind. However, if you remain filial towards a cruel or negligent parent, you are virtuous without peer.

Thus, contrary to what most people think, we must not abandon or disdain bad parents. We must be filial to them like Emperor Shun was to his wicked stepmother and half-brother. As family relationships are brought about by unresolved past karma, it is inevitable that we will have both karmic enemies and karmic friends as our parents or

siblings. The key is to treat all of them kindly regardless of how they treat us. By being constant in virtue against inconstancy, we will eradicate the evil karma that our past life whims, biases and caprice have created. However, if we give love for love and hate for hate, we will create even more emotionalism and complicated karma that will trouble us in future lives.

Moreover, according to the Jade Record:

Good deeds done sincerely and often will yield great and profound rewards. Trivial rewards come quickly — but profound bliss and unimaginable rewards come only after a while."

"In this world, there are many who do good. Nevertheless, there are hardly any people who steadfastly do good. A man who insincerely does a few good deeds— and immediately stops when his own sloth and doubts rise to test him—will never reap the true and profound benefits of virtue. Such a man has had his judgment compromised by his lack of patience."

Therefore, it is clear that unwavering virtue will bring limitless rewards and eradicate multitudes of past evil karma. However, given that temptations and provocations are rife in this world, only forbearance and sheer will can allow us to take advantage of this opportunity. If we fail to diligently do good while we can, we will cycle back into the evil realms where there is no hope and no escape.

Furthermore, people nowadays often curse God or lose their faith in religion if their prayers are not answered or if things don't go their way. However, this is actually a grave mistake. Heaven does not need sycophants or hanger-ons. While Heaven loves all sentient beings, only those who are pious through thick and thin can earn the admiration of Heaven. So the only way to have prayers answered is to give offerings in good times and bad times, whether something is sought for or not, when sunny or rainy, always.

Thus, whenever tempers flare or temptation entices , always remember the aforementioned saying: **Acceptance of losses and slights is the root of fortune ; contending invites only disasters.** These words cannot be more true.

2) Speedy Enlightenment & Bodhi

Furthermore, according to the Diamond Sutra:

"Subhuti, the Tathagata has said that what is called transcendent endurance is not transcendent endurance. That is why it is called transcendent endurance. Why? Subhuti, thousands of lifetimes ago when my body was cut into pieces by King Kalinga, I was not caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span. If, at that time, I had been caught up in any of those ideas, I would have felt anger and ill-will against the king."

"I also remember in ancient times, for 500 lifetimes, I practiced transcendent endurance by not being caught up in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span. So, Subhuti, when a bodhisattva gives rise to the unequalled mind of awakening, he has to give up all ideas. He cannot not rely on forms when he gives rise to that mind, nor on sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or objects of mind. He can only give rise to that mind that is not caught up in anything."

King Kalinga was a regional ruler who once killed an earlier incarnation of the Buddha through slow slicing. However, as the Buddha (then a Bodhisattva) had already transcended attachments to the body and forms, he felt neither pain nor hatred. In fact, this atrocity actually confirmed his Non-abidance and allowed him to immediately achieve Bodhi.

Therefore, it is no surprise that forbearance is one of the Six Paramitas (i.e. virtue, charity, samadhi, wisdom, diligence and patience). The only way for us to achieve transcendent endurance is to single-mindedly recite Amita Buddha (in fact, the Buddha reveals in the Infinite Life Sutra that he too attained Bodhi by practicing mindfulness of Amita Buddha). Once we have only Amita Buddha on our minds, we will no longer be influenced by attachments and passions. However, that too requires forbearance to achieve. Therefore, there can be no diligence without forbearance. If there is no diligence, there will be no samadhi, virtue, charity and wisdom (all of which require constant efforts to perfect). Thus, it can be said that the root of Bodhi is forbearance. All Dharmas are attained by forbearance (Diamond Sutra).

3) Success in the present life

In the Treatise on Response and Retribution, it is stated that the virtuous do not hold

grudges or seek revenge. It is also states that the virtuous are protected by auspicious gods and bestowed by Heaven with wealth, status, health and so forth. Furthermore, depending on their level of virtue and forbearance, they will have their lifespan increased by either 12 year or 100 day periods.

Furthermore, at the end of the treatise, it is mentioned that Heaven will bestow fortune within three years onto those who diligently do good. Thus, by bearing slights or injustice with patience, we lay the seeds for a bountiful harvest. However, by giving hate for hate, even if we manage to gain the upper hand, we would just be doing the equivalent of pawning our seeds for a pittance while allowing our fields to fall into ruin.

The same applies to pride. Many cannot exercise forbearance because of their pride. They worry that if they do not retaliate, people might think of them as somehow less worthy and inferior. The truth could not be more different. Respectability and nobility never fall onto the laps of the petty, loud, insolent and vindictive. Such people are disdained by Heaven and all under it ; even if people outwardly admire them, they secretly despise them in their hearts. On the other hand, the meek, forgiving and kind are loved by all (even if it is not obvious) and cherished by Heaven. Any fool can lash out, but only the great can restrain themselves. Thus, do not let this imaginary feeling called pride interfere with the display of forbearance. **No one looks down on the humble and forgiving, only the humble and forgiving may make the mistake of looking down on themselves.**

In conclusion, we must never neglect the importance of patience. The precepts must be kept at all costs, the name of Amitabha must be recited regularly and opportunities to do good deeds must never be neglected.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRECEPTS

Nowadays, many who are interested in Buddhism often focus only on meditation or the study of the high principles found in the sutras. They often neglect the precepts and may even indulge in drugs, wrong views and licentiousness, erroneously thinking that they are "transcending" to a higher state.

However, the Buddha could not be more clear when he said that the five precepts are the foundation of the Dharma ; the Threefold Training unambiguously states that Sila (higher virtue) is the key that leads to Samadhi and Prajna. No one can attain liberation while committing sins and offenses. The five precepts are:

- 1.) NO STEALING AND GREED**
- 2.) NO SEXUAL MISCONDUCT**
- 3.) NO KILLING AND PHYSICAL ABUSE**
- 4.) NO SLANDERING, LYING, PROFANITY AND TACTLESSNESS**
- 5.) NO ALCOHOL AND DRUGS (I.E. BE DISCIPLINED AND FILIAL)**

For monks and nuns, these virtues would include the additional rules found in the Monastic Vinaya. These precepts apply equally to thought, speech and action.

Furthermore, the Venerable Master Chin Kung has stated that the profound wisdom found in the Shurangama Sutra, Lotus Sutra, Avatamsaka Sutra, Diamond Sutra and so forth are akin to the fruits and blossoms of a tree. The soil that supports the flora is the precepts. Hence, if we do not cultivate the precepts, we would never understand the deeper meanings of the sutras beyond the superficial surface level. For instance, Patriarch Huineng truly understood the Diamond Sutra the first time he heard a gatha of it despite being illiterate and having never studied Buddhism. On the other hand, many scholars have studied the Diamond Sutra for their whole lives but have neither gained profound insight nor achieved the Buddha's highest wisdom.

Thus, it is clear that Patriarch Huineng's filial piety, forbearance, modesty and simple virtuousness was the reason for his sudden liberation.

Furthermore, the Buddha offers more important advice in the Shurangama Sutra:

"When you teach people of the world to cultivate Samadhi, they must first of all cut off the mind of sexual desire. This is the first clear and decisive instruction on purity given by the Tathagatas, the Buddhas of the past, the Bhagavans. Therefore, Ananda, if cultivators of Dhyana Samadhi do not exterminate sexual desire, they are like someone who cooks sand hoping to get rice. After hundreds of thousands of eons, it will still just be hot sand. Why? It wasn't rice to begin with; it was only sand. If you seek the Buddha's wonderful fruition with a body of sexual desire, then even if you attain a wonderful awakening, it is still based on sexual desire. With sexual desire at the source, you will revolve in the three paths and not be able to get out. Which road will you take to cultivate and be certified to the Tathagata's Nirvana? You must exterminate the sexual desire which is intrinsic to both body and mind, then get rid of even the aspect of extermination. At that point you have some hope of attaining the Buddha's Bodhi. What I have said here is the Buddhas' teaching. Any explanation counter to it is the teaching of Papiyan(demon king)."

"Further, Ananda, if beings in the six paths of any mundane world had no thoughts of killing, they would not have to undergo a continual succession of births and deaths. Your basic purpose in cultivating Samadhi is to transcend the wearisome defilements. But if you do not renounce your thoughts of killing, you will not be able to get out of the dust. Even though people may have some wisdom and the manifestation of Dhyana Samadhi, they are certain to enter the path of spirits if they do not cease killing. At best, they will become ghosts of great strength; on the average, they will become flying yakshas, ghost leaders, or the like; at the lowest level, they will become earth-bound rakshasas. These ghosts and spirits all have their followers. Each claims that he has accomplished the Unsurpassed Way. After my Nirvana, in the Dharma-ending Age, these hordes of ghosts and spirits will abound, spreading like wildfire as they argue that eating meat will bring one to the Bodhi Way. Ananda, I permit the Bhikshus to eat five kinds of pure meat. This meat is actually a transformation brought into being by my spiritual powers. It basically has no life-force. You Brahmans live in a climate so hot and humid, and on such sandy and rocky land, that vegetables will not grow; therefore, I have had to assist you with spiritual powers and compassion. Because of this magnanimous kindness and compassion, this so-called meat suits your taste. After my extinction, how can those who eat the flesh of beings be called the disciples of Shakya? You should know that, even if these meat-eaters may enter the heart-open state similar to Samadhi, they are all great Rakshas. When their retribution ends, they are bound to sink into the bitter

sea of birth and death. They are not disciples of the Buddha. Such people as these kill and eat one another in a never-ending cycle. How can such people transcend the Triple Realm? "

"When you teach people of the world to cultivate Samadhi, they must also cease killing. This is the second clear and decisive instruction on purity given by the Tathagatas, the Buddhas of the Past, the Bhagavans. Therefore, Ananda, if cultivators of Dhyana Samadhi do not stop killing, they are like one who stops up his ears and calls out in a loud voice, thinking that no one hears him.. He tries to cover up the sound, but only makes it greater. Pure Bhikshus and Bodhisattvas who practice purity will not even step on grass in the pathway; even less would they pull it up with their hands. How could anyone with great compassion consume the flesh and blood of beings? Bhikshus who do not wear silk, leather boots, furs, or down, whether imported or found locally, and who do not consume milk, cream, or butter, can truly transcend this world. When they have paid back their past debts, they will not have to re-enter the Triple Realm. Why not? When someone wears anything taken from a living creature, he creates relationships with the creature, just as when people ate the hundred grains, their feet could not leave the earth. Both physically and mentally one must avoid the bodies and the by-products of beings, by neither wearing them nor eating them. I say that such people have true liberation. What I have said here is the Buddhas' teaching. Any explanation counter to it is the teaching of Papiyan(demon king)."

"Further, Ananda, if beings in the six paths of any mundane world had no thoughts of stealing, they would not have to undergo a continuous succession of births and deaths. Your basic purpose in cultivating Samadhi is to transcend the wearisome defilements. But if you do not renounce your thoughts of stealing, you will not be able to get out of the dust. Even though people may have some wisdom and the manifestation of Dhyana Samadhi, they are certain to enter a deviant path if they do not cease stealing. At best, they will become spirits; on the average, they will become evil ghosts; at the lowest level, they will become deviant people who are possessed by various sprites. These deviant hordes all have their followers. Each claims that he has accomplished the Unsurpassed Way. After my Nirvana, in the Dharma-ending Age, these evil and deviant entities will abound, spreading like wildfire as they surreptitiously cheat others. Calling themselves good knowing advisors, they will each claim that they have attained the Unsurpassed Dharma. Enticing and deceiving the ignorant, or frightening people out of their wits, they disrupt and lay waste to households wherever they go."

Ananda, although beings in the six paths of any mundane world may not kill, steal, or lust either physically or mentally, these three aspects of their conduct thus being perfect, if they tell various major lies, then the Samadhi they attain will not be pure. They will become demons of love and views and will lose the seed of the Tathagata. They claim that they have attained what they have not attained, and that they have been certified when they have not been certified. Perhaps they seek to be foremost in the world, most venerated and superior people. They announce to their audiences that they have attained the fruition of a Shrotaapanna, of a Sakridagamin, of an Anagamin, of Arhatship, of the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, or the various levels of Bodhisattvahood up to and including the Ten Bhumi(stage)s, in order to cause others to revere and repent in front of them and because they are greedy for offerings. These icchantikas destroy the seeds of Buddhahood just as surely as a tala-tree is destroyed if it is chopped down. The Buddha predicts that such people cut off their good roots forever and lose their knowledge and vision. Immersed in the sea of the Three Sufferings, they cannot attain Samadhi."

"I command that after my Nirvana, Bodhisattvas and Arhats appear in response-bodies in the Dharma-ending Age, and take various forms in order to rescue those in the cycle of rebirth. They should either become Shramanas, white-robed laypeople, kings, ministers or officials, virgin youths or maidens, and so forth, even prostitutes, widows, profligates, thieves, butchers, or dealers in contraband, be confreres of these kinds of people, praise the Buddha Vehicle and cause them to enter Samadhi in body and mind. But they should never say of themselves, 'I am truly a Bodhisattva'; or 'I am truly an Arhat,' or let the Buddhas' secret cause leak out by speaking casually to those who have not yet studied, other than at the end of their lives and then only to those who inherit the teaching. Otherwise, aren't such people deluding and confusing beings and indulging in gross false claims?"

As we now live in the turbid Dharma-ending age, the Buddha's advice here serves as an vital litmus test that will help us determine which views are proper and which are not. However, we must remember to never use the Buddha's words to harshly criticize others, even if they are indeed wrong. **Buddhism can only prosper when cultivators praise each other.** If we see something controversial, it is better to say nothing and continue to recite Amitabha's name. This way, we will avoid slandering others by accident.

For instance, Tibetan Buddhism is an esoteric Dharma-door that is often misunderstood. The Ven. Master Chin Kung has stated that the Dharma-door of

Tibetan Buddhism is meant for Bodhisattvas (cultivators who rank higher than Arhats) and not ordinary people. These Bodhisattvas cultivate samadhi by directly testing themselves against attachments. That is why they may eat meat and some Tantric statues have a courtesan sitting on the Buddha's lap. If they are successful in having no attachments to these temptations, they become Buddhas. This is just like how the Buddha achieved Bodhi by not being angry in an earlier incarnation when King Kalinga killed him though slow slicing. However, if regular people were to practice this Dharma-door, they would not be able to resist the temptations and will fall into the Relentless Hells. Therefore, the reason these teachings are kept secret is because the public will twist and abuse it if they get their hands on it. People, in their ignorance, will think that such a Dharma-door promotes lust, attachment and killing and consequently misuse these esoteric teachings to falsely defend their own outrageous conduct.

Thus, such cases are the reason we should only mind our own business. If someone who does not understand the situation were to make indiscriminate and blind accusations against Tibetan Buddhism, they would be slandering the Buddha's teachings. The karmic retribution that follows those who slander the Buddha are the heaviest

Therefore, it is no surprise that both the Treatise on Response and Retribution and Lord Superior Wen Chang's Tract of the Quiet Way stipulate that it is a sin to openly talk negatively about others. In fact, it is a great virtue to praise all that which is good and refrain from criticizing and making accusations, even when they are true. According to the Shurangama Sutra, sentient beings who are half merit (i.e. wisdom and good deeds) and half emotion (i.e. bad karma and evil habits) are reborn as human beings. Thus, we all have relatively coarse habits of greed, hatred and delusion. Therefore, it would be hypocritical for us to harshly criticize or ostracize others. After all, people in glass houses should not throw stones.

Lastly, the reason many today regularly break the five precepts is because they do not understand the karmic implications of their actions. The Buddha frequently warns in every sutra that karmic retributions are no laughing matter. Once a man is reborn as a hell being, emaciated ghoul or animal, he will have to undergo kalpa after kalpa of unspeakable suffering. Even death will not give him relief as rebirth in the evil realms are repeated for eons. For instance, people who have fallen into the Relentless Hells die from their sufferings every minute, but are instantly restored to life to suffer the punishments again. Thus, everyone must heed the following exhortations:

EXCERPTS FROM THE JADE RECORD

The following illustrations are selections from the most recent edition of the Jade Record. They were drawn by Jiang Yi Zi (江逸子) through psychography. The deity that guided his hand when he drew these pictures is the Demigod Magistrate Cheng Huang. He holds the rank of Praetor in the administration of the Four Heavenly Kings and his duty is to promote the laws of karma. Thus, these pictures provide us with an accurate idea of the suffering in the evil paths that awaits those who commit karmic offenses.



Amita Buddha with his retinue of Sages welcoming a successful aspirant into Pureland. This is the august sight that welcomes virtuous cultivators such as Ven. Master Hai Xian when their last moment arrives.

Moreover, according to the Ven. Master Chin Kung, people who are reborn in Pureland have not actually died but simply acquired infinite life. Thus, some cultivators (such as Ananda) have instantly returned to their old bodies to continue their Dharma work, but now with the powers of a Bodhisattva.

KING YAMA'S JUDGMENT



Those who failed to seek rebirth in Pureland and instead committed evils are brought before King Yama. There are numerous lesser courts and countless punishments due to the wide variety of specific offenses.

However, as mentioned before, there is a 49-day grace period before rebirth in the evil paths is finalized and punishments are inflicted. If the relatives of the deceased can diligently amass good deeds on behalf of the departed within that time frame, the deceased can have their karmic situation rectified. They will be freed from their original fate and achieve rebirth as aristocrats or devas on account of the merits created on their behalf.

AN IMPORTANT REMINDER

Punishments in the evil paths are neither ordered by King Yama nor devised by the Jade Emperor. They are purely the result of an offender's own karma. King Yama and Praetor Cheng Huang are merely messengers who try to teach the laws of karma to the obstinate, arrogant and evil beings who fall into such states of woe. For instance, according to the Shurangama Sutra:

"Ananda, it all comes from the karmic responses which living beings themselves invoke. They create ten habitual causes and undergo six interacting retributions. What are the ten causes? Ananda, the first consists the habit of lustful intercourse which gives rise to mutual rubbing. When this rubbing continues without cease, it activates a tremendous raging fire, just as warmth arises between a person's hands when he rubs them together. Because these two habits set each other ablaze, there come into being the Iron Bed, the Copper Pillar, and other such experiences. Therefore the Tathagatas of the ten directions look upon the act of lust and name it the 'fire of desire.' Bodhisattvas avoid desire as they would a fiery pit."

Thus, those who indulge in lust and adultery create pertinent seeds of karma that are stored in their consciousness. When they die, these seeds manifest from their Alaya-consciousness and spontaneously arrange the five skandhas and four elements into a realm and state of suffering. The same goes for all the other types of offenses.

For example, there once was a person of high meditative ability and virtue who appealed to Praetor Cheng Huang to abolish the punishments found in the hells on the grounds that they were inhumane. However, the Praetor simply guided the cultivator to the place where punishments were inflicted and told him to see for himself. The virtuous cultivator looked around but saw nothing at all. Hence, he realized afterwards that the punishments of the evil paths were not created by anyone but instead caused by the evil habits and delusions of the offenders themselves.

RETRIBUTIONS FOR LUSTFUL MISCONDUCT



Those who have indulged in lust, promiscuity, adultery and depravity will be forced to hug a flaming copper pillar as one of their punishments after their lives draw to a close.

Lust is considered the foremost offense by Sages since it gives rise to countless ills and faults. For instance—lying, violence, crimes of passion, divorce, disintegration of marriages, broken families, social decay, jealousy, venereal diseases, abortions, disrepute, decadence, feuds, legal penalties, poverty and even wars often result from lust and love.

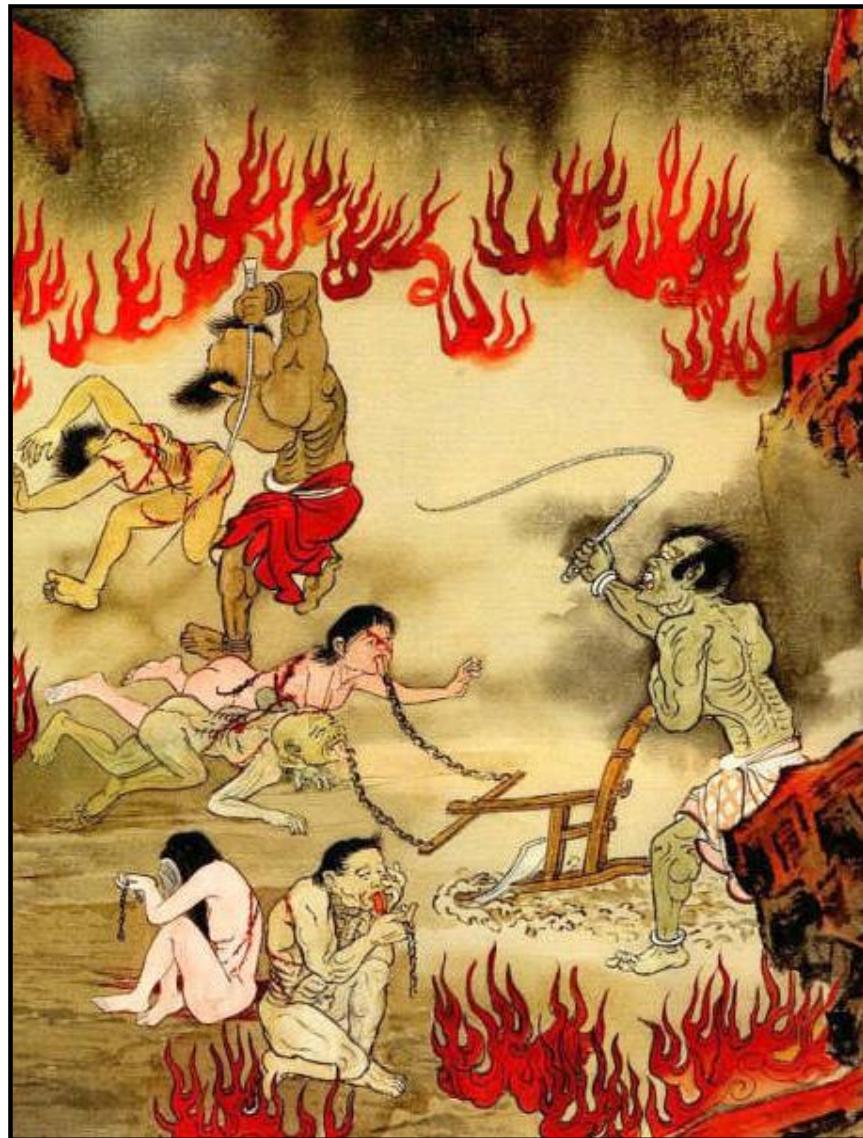
Furthermore, according to an edition of Master Yin Guang's Treatise on Response and Retribution, those who create and publish pornography and erotic literature will fall into the Relentless Hell and suffer there for eons without end.

RETRIBUTIONS FOR KILLING ANIMALS



Those who had bred, slaughtered, skinned and butchered animals for meat and leather will meet a similar fate after their passing.

RETRIBUTIONS FOR CAPRICIOUS SPEECH



People who are fond of verbal abuse, lies, divisive speech, cajolery, slander, libel, incitement, ridicule, gossip and the like will have their tongues pulled out as one of their punishments.

Furthermore, orators, statesmen, professionals and intellectuals who use their status and skills to spread deviant ideas, ruin the innocent or engage in demagoguery will also be punished in this manner.

RETRIBUTIONS FOR AVARICE

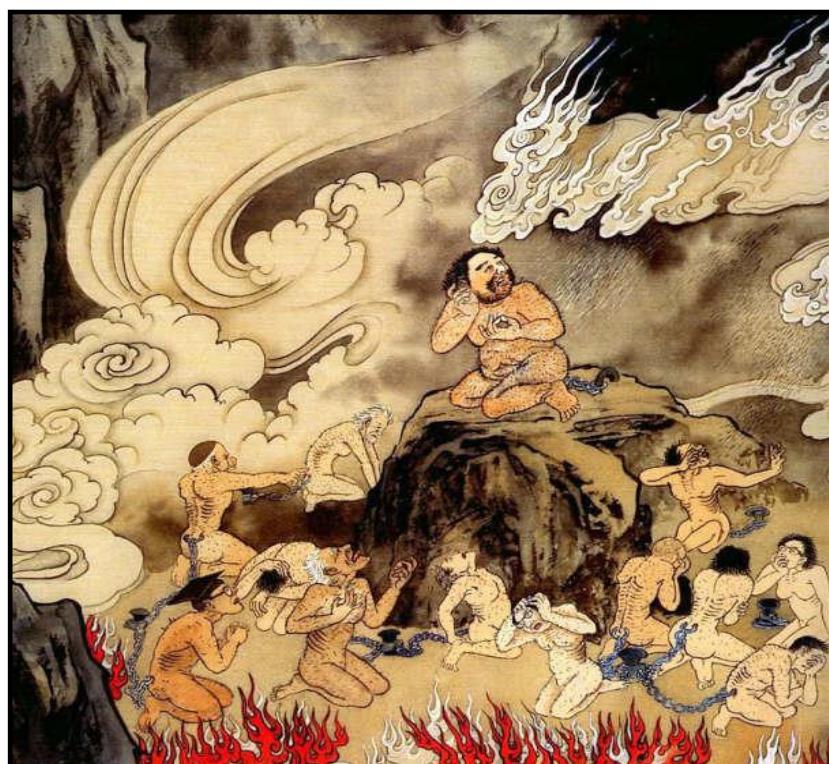


Those who have engaged in usury, fraud, corruption, embezzlement and extortion will be punished by being repeatedly sucked dry by vampires and harpies.

Furthermore, inhumane officials, judges and rulers who confiscate, fine, expropriate, impose taxes and or employ policies such as penal labor, asset freezing, eminent domain, forfeiture and the like will also be punished in this manner after their passing.

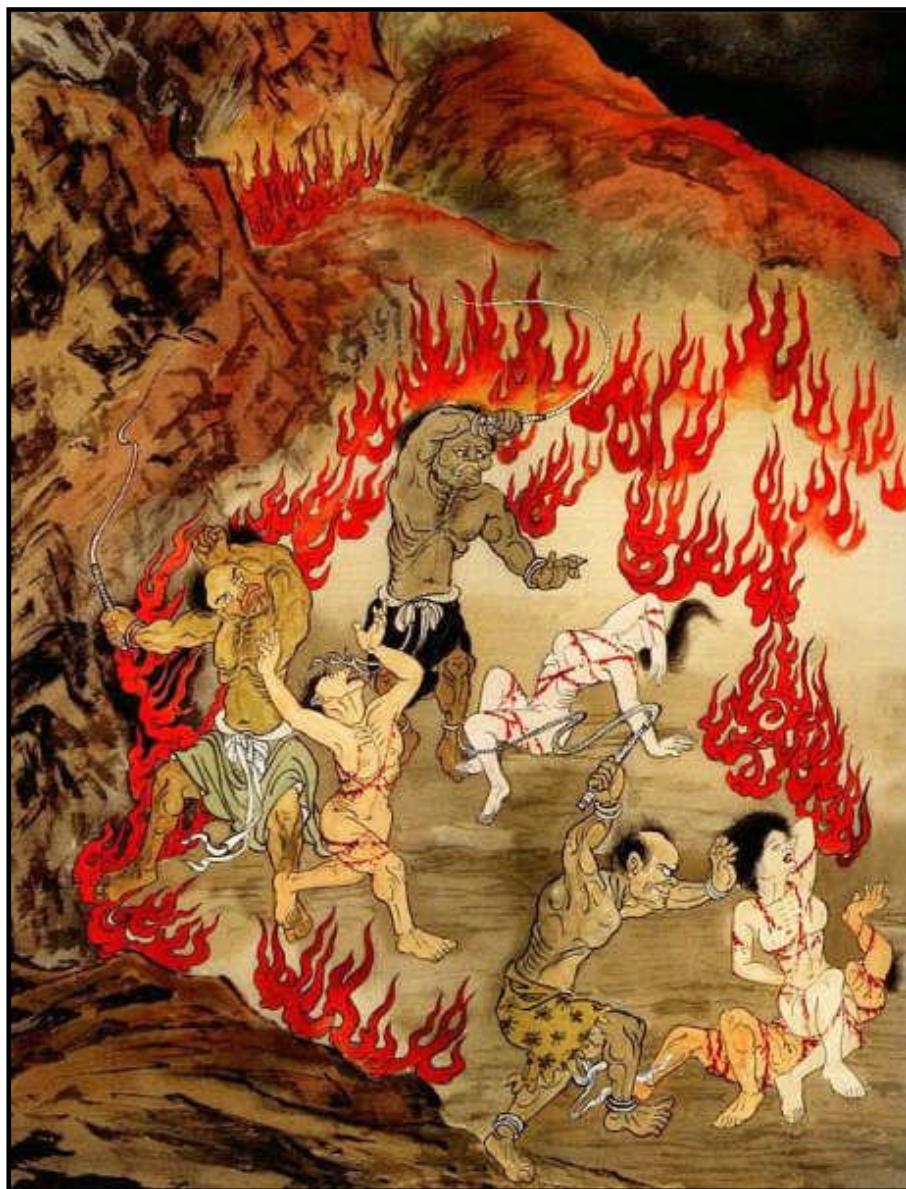
Moreover, men of wealth who are greedy and callous will likewise be punished in such ways if they do not become kind and charitable before their deaths.

RETRIBUTIONS FOR ABORTION



**People who abort unborn babies will be mauled and devoured by fierce tigers.
Those who justify and incite abortions will be punished by raining needles.**

RETRIBUTIONS FOR DISCRIMINATION AND TYRANNY



People who have abused their authority or strength will be lashed by barbed wire whips amid flames once their lives end. A Sage once said: " Even though ants are weak and small, their lives are cherished by Heaven." Hence, offenses such as racism, inequality, stigmatization, xenophobia, child abuse, animal abuse, bullying, tyranny, oppression, cruel and inhumane punishment, military action and the like will lead to the aforementioned punishment.

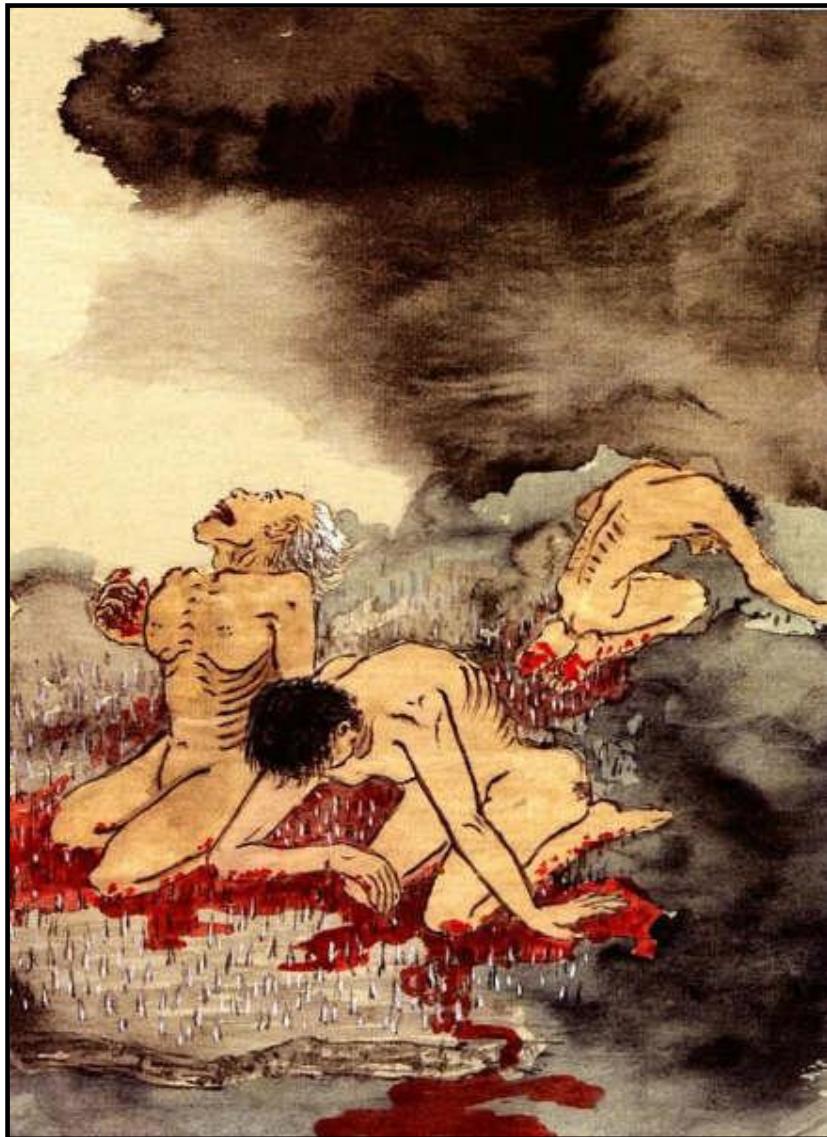
RETRIBUTIONS FOR MISERLINESS



Those who refused to give alms or be charitable within their power will be reborn in scorching deserts as emaciated ghouls. Their hideous bloated stomachs have insatiable appetites but their barren abode offers nothing for them to eat. If they happen to chance upon something edible—as soon as they try to eat it—a plume of fire will shoot out from their throats and reduce the food to crisp. Thus, they can never ease their thirst and hunger.

The Bodhisattva seen giving food to the ghouls is Guanyin Mahabodhisattva. Because special mantras are chanted, the ghouls are able to eat the food given by the Bodhisattva. However, each of us can also help ease the suffering of these hell beings and emaciated ghouls by dedicating the merits from our good deeds to them.

RETRIBUTIONS FOR IMMORAL MEDICAL PRACTICES



Doctors and medical professionals who violate the Hippocratic Oath or are inhumane, deceitful and immoral will suffer the above punishment after their deaths. According to Buddhist teachings, doctors who are not interested in profit and tirelessly donate their skills will gain limitless merits.

Furthermore, the teachings of the Sages require that doctors not charge fees for their work. They must never discriminate against those who are poor, weak or stigmatized. The compensation that they receive should be strictly limited to voluntary gifts from the patients and their families. Moreover, the same principle applies to teachers. For instance, Confucius and Mencius never asked for pomp, power or aristocratic titles—they simply taught those who sought their wisdom and lived off whatever was offered to them.

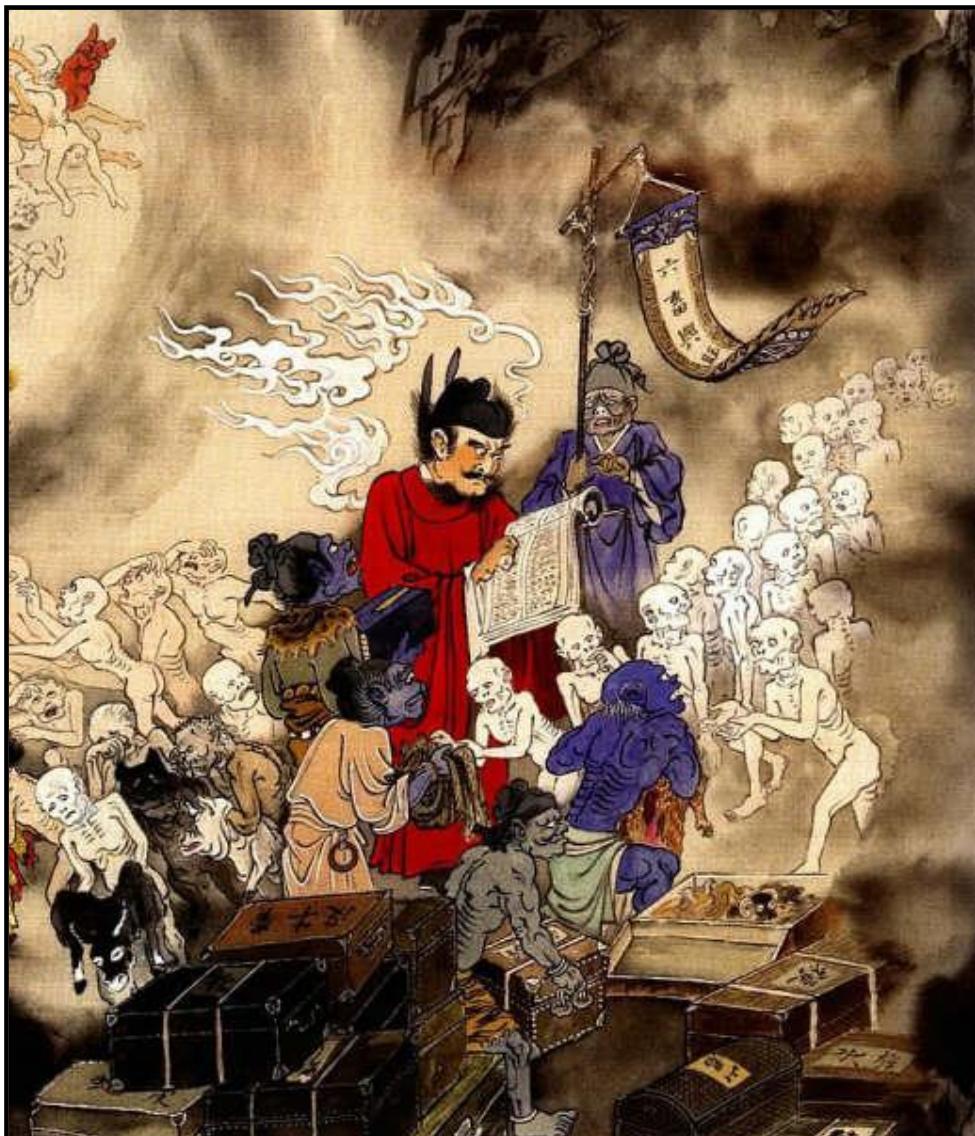
RETRIBUTIONS FOR DESIGNING AND SELLING WEAPONRY



This gruesome scene illustrates the suffering that befalls upon those who have designed, produced and sold arms and weaponry during their lives.

Wars are in direct opposition to the principles of benevolence that the Buddha and other Sages such as Lao Tzu, Confucius and Mencius have taught. Hence, those who create the tools that make armed conflict possible will bear heavy punishments once their lives end. Nations and statesmen often rally around military action and praise those who help with the war effort. However, the laws of karma does not subscribe to such obstinate hypocrisy and will mete out retributions to all those who kill and help others to kill.

RESIDUAL RETRIBUTIONS



Once those who have been punished in the hells and evil paths have exhausted their stocks of evil karma, they become eligible for rebirth in a higher plane of existence. However, human rebirth is often unobtainable since evil habits still taint them. Hence, they are punished by their residual evil karma to be reborn successively as animals.

For instance, in a eye-witness account originating from the Qing Dynasty, a butcher once discovered that the liver of a pig he had just slaughtered had the words "Cao Cao" burnt onto it. Cao Cao was one of the main warlords of the Three Kingdoms era. Thus, all his former power and Machiavellian deviousness was of no avail to him after his sins forced him to assume the body of a pig.

CONCLUSION- HOW TO REFORM

If a man who has long committed evil repents and thereafter does all good and refrains from all evil, then he will be bestowed with great fortune after a while.

-Treatise on Response and Retribution

Having seen the horrific nature and severity of the retributions for evil, we should diligently discard our vices and amass virtues. As the above quote states that virtue and good deeds can neutralize past evils—we should never again kill, steal, lie, indulge in excess, or fail to be filial towards our parents and elders. Furthermore, we should regularly give what we can to charity and protect animal life by purchasing and liberating captive animals slated for slaughter. Moreover, we ought to print Buddhist texts and produce images of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas for free distribution. The merits from turning the great Dharma Wheel—printing Buddhist texts and making Buddha images—are particularly exalted. The following is Patriarch Yin Guang's summarization of the main rewards for turning the great Dharma Wheel:

- 1.) Any pending karmic retributions will be eradicated, the most heavy ones will be reduced greatly.
- 2.) You will gain the protection of auspicious devas, gods and deities. Furthermore, you will avoid wars, disasters, bandits, thefts, diseases, floods and fires. Also, you will never be imprisoned or arrested.
- 3.) You will be released from the cycle of hatred and revenge as your past karmic enemies will share your merits and become devas or Sages.
- 4.) Vicious beasts, evil ghosts and demons cannot harm you.
- 5.) Your anxieties will fade away. No misfortune will befall upon you during the day and your dreams at night will always be sweet. Your strength will be full and your complexion will be radiant and healthy. Anything you do will be successful.
- 6.) As you are sincere and devoted to the Dharma, you will naturally have good fortune, long life, a harmonious family and abundant stocks of all the necessities of life.

7.) Your words and actions will please the gods. Moreover, you will be welcomed and respected in all the places you go to.

8.) Your wisdom, happiness and health will increase everyday. If you are a woman, you will be reborn as an eminent man.

9.) You will be forever free from rebirth in the hells and evil paths. You will always be reborn as a deva or member of the aristocracy. Furthermore, you will be wise, handsome and fortunate.

10.) You will help convert sentient beings towards the Way. Moreover, you will be perpetually close to the Buddha and Dharma until you attain liberation.

Lastly, if we look back to Amita Buddha's 48 Vows, we can see that taking refuge in Amita Buddha is the only way to truly and permanently free ourselves of the threat of the evil paths:

Sutra Vows 21: The Vow of Forgiveness

"When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, there would not be one virtuous and willing sentient being who could not easily attain rebirth in my land. However, if sentient beings who have long committed evil repent after hearing my name, and thereafter adheres to the Buddhadharma while yearning for rebirth in my land, then such beings will be saved from the evil paths and rise to my land upon their deaths. Until this vow is fulfilled, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."

Thus, we must have faith that Pureland rebirth is open to all who are willing. Even those who are in the hells can manifest in Pureland within a space of a thought by taking refuge in Amita Buddha. Once in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, they will never retrogress and will dwell in the bliss of Bodhisattvahood ; the evil paths have forever collapsed behind them.

For instance, Venerable Yin Ke was a Song dynasty monk who had flagrantly broken several important precepts. One day, he read the Earth Store Sutra (which contains detailed descriptions of all the hells) and realized that his heavy sins will force him into the Relentless Hell (the worst of all the hells). Fearing this, he searched for a way to escape this retribution and later came upon the Infinite Life Sutra. He then retreated back to his room and diligently recited Amita Buddha's name unceasingly for 3 full days. At the end of that period, Amita Buddha appeared before him and he was saved!

ONE HUMANITY, MANY FAITHS

VENERABLE MASTER CHIN KUNG AM

AN INTERFAITH SUMMIT FOR PEACE AND HARMONY

IN AUSTRALIA AND THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

18-21, FEBRUARY 2009

Distinguished faith elders, scholars, and guests:

Hello, everyone! It is quite rare that I have this opportunity to listen to your valuable opinions. I am truly grateful.

Australia is a country where many cultures, many ethnic groups, and many faiths intermingle. This country pays particular attention to the human spirit of equality, harmony, mutual respect, and mutual help. The reality is that, because of ease of travel, advanced technology, and availability of information, the whole world has become a village, and we are now in an era of the intermingling of religions, of ethnic groups, and of cultures. I deeply believe that determining how to strengthen interfaith communication and cooperation, and to achieve the ideal of social and world harmony is an important issue that everyone present is concerned about.

UNEARTHING THE ROOT OF CONFLICT

After the September 11 attacks, the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Queensland invited me to participate in a symposium at the university attended by professors from the centre. During the panel, I presented my view, explaining that the true root of conflict is the conflict between our true nature and our acquired habits within us.

The true nature is of the utmost purity and virtuousness. It is perfect and radiant. Habits are the bad thoughts and views that one acquired after birth. Simply put, the conflict between the true nature and acquired habits is the conflict between altruism and self-benefit. Compassion, loving-kindness, and all virtues are innate in the true nature of all beings, but selfishness and all bad thoughts are not.

Therefore, if those who engage in the teaching of peace can (1) truly resolve in their minds their conflicts with anyone, any matter, and any thing, (2) let go of all selfish thoughts and actions of controlling and possessing, and (3) interact with others and engage in tasks with sincere love, then this would truly be the basic way to resolve all contradictions and conflicts in the world.

A harmonious world must begin with our minds.

Modern science has gradually come to prove this fact. Dr. Masaru Emoto of Japan has conducted water experiments for more than a decade and found that water can understand human thoughts, react naturally to them and thus change accordingly. When water was introduced to thoughts of love and gratitude, it displayed beautiful crystals. When the same water was bombarded with thoughts of hatred and disgust, it displayed broken, ugly crystals. Dr. Emoto once said with deep feeling, “In hundreds of thousands of experiments, the most beautiful water crystals are elicited by the thoughts of love and gratitude. ‘Love’ and ‘gratitude’ seem to be the core of the universe.”

I deeply agree with this view. Consider this: water, which is only a mineral, can react this way. So, if human beings, who have the highest spiritual awareness of all creatures, can communicate with one another with sincere love, there is no reason that conflict and contradiction can not be resolved.

In October 2005, I met with Elder Mahathir, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia. The elder asked if there would ever be any peace in the world. I have humbly learned the teachings of the Buddha and the sages for fifty-eight years and dare not slack off for even one day. I believe the ancient teachings and affirm that human nature is originally good.

Therefore, I sincerely proposed that if every country, every ethnic group, every political party and faction, and every religious group can broaden their minds and horizons, treat one another equally, get along with them harmoniously, seek common ground and put aside differences, and exist and flourish side by side, then an ideal harmonious society and world will definitely be realized. It is difficult to achieve this, but if we start with achieving religious cooperation, it will have a positive impact on the cooperation of countries, of ethnic groups, and of political parties. Elder Mahathir readily agreed with this proposal. The next day, he invited me to attend the Perdana Global Peace Forum to be held in Kuala Lumpur under his sponsorship in December 2005.

WHY CAN RELIGIOUS COOPERATION RESOLVE CONFLICT?

In 1998, I was living in Singapore. At that time, there were nine major religious groups there. I interacted with them with sincerity and we became good friends. Later on, I also had wonderful opportunities to interact and seek advice from religious elders in countries such as Japan, Indonesia, China, Malaysia, and Australia. I learned tremendously from them.

I deeply feel that all religious sages used the intrinsic essences of “compassion, loving-kindness, sincerity, respectfulness, humility, and harmony” to teach all beings to end wrongdoings and practice virtuous conduct, to break through delusion and attain enlightenment, and to get along harmoniously with one another and treat one another equally. Their teachings encompass the teachings of morality, virtues, the law of cause and effect, philosophy, and science.

For example, Hinduism teaches “No harming, no stealing, chastity, kindness, impartiality, patience, perseverance, a moderate diet, and cleanliness. These are the ten precepts.”

Zoroastrianism teaches “Consider them as thine own, and this is thy religion.”

Catholicism teaches “You love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

Christianity teaches “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”

Confucianism teaches “Human beings, regardless of nationality, race, or religions, everyone should be loved equally. We are all sheltered by the same sky and we all live on the same planet Earth.”

Islam teaches “There is only one moral norm, which is the principle of universal love originating from selfless and virtuous deeds.”

Taoism teaches “Be loyal to one’s superior, be filial to one’s parents, respect one’s brothers, and be a trustworthy friend.”

Sikhism teaches “More than all else do I cherish at heart that love which makes me to live a limitless life in this world.”

Bahaism teaches “The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness,...” and “The peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God.”

Buddhism says “Be filial and provide for parents, and be respectful to and serve teachers,” “Do nothing that is bad; do everything that is good,” “Be greatly compassionate. People will abide by morality. The land and people will be enveloped in peace.”

Therefore, we know:

Love is the true mind, the true nature, truly what it is (suchness), and Dharma nature.

Love is the original nature, the innate goodness, the utmost purity, and the utmost virtuousness.

Love is the truth, true meaning, life, and eternity.

Love is holiness, God, Allah, and the holy spirit.

Love nurtures everything in the universe. Everything in the universe is born and grows from love.

Love is the root of all virtues, all abilities, and all good fortune.

From this we can deeply believe that if the religious groups whose teachings are based on sincere love can truly work together and propagate their teachings extensively, they will definitely be able to help all beings uncover their innate goodness and resolve all contradictions and conflicts.

ALL RELIGIONS ARE ONE FAMILY

Although the texts of each religion give different descriptions of the origin of life and the universe, my religious friends all affirm that the one and only True God has perfect wisdom and extraordinary powers and his teaching varies according to the geographical environment, lifestyle, culture, education, and the needs of each ethnic group. In China, he manifested as Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, and Zhuangzi. In Buddhism, he manifested as Sakyamuni Buddha. In Christianity, he manifested as Jesus, in Judaism, as Moses, and in Islam, as Muhammad. Buddhism teaches that

everything is one entity; everything is “manifested by the true mind and altered by the consciousness.” The true mind is actually another name for Allah and God. The same True God has various manifestation bodies, which are ultimately the same. Their common goal is to help all beings end wrongdoings and practice virtuous conduct, and break through delusion and attain enlightenment.

The concept of holomovement proposed by modern scientist David Bohm is a great inspiration to us. The core of this concept is that the universe is an undivided wholeness. The whole has closely interconnected parts. Any one of the parts carries the information of the whole. In other words, the whole is included in every one of the parts.

All the religions are like the different departments of a university. The chancellor is the one and only True God. The professors of each department are the manifestation bodies of the True God.

From this concept, we can deeply appreciate that all of the different religions in the world are one family. We should completely let go of arrogance, jealousy, and greed, treat one another equally, get along with everyone harmoniously, and work together to help people awaken. Suffering arises from delusion. Happiness arises from awakening. Only when we are truly awakened will we naturally leave suffering behind and attain happiness.

TRAVELING WILL ENHANCE COMMUNICATION

When I was living in Singapore, I invited the nine representatives from the Inter-religious Organization of Singapore (IRO) to come to our lecture hall to teach and to have dialogs with the Buddhist practitioners. I also visited them and lectured at their invitation. We learned from one another. During the millennium dinner party, the representatives of the IRO sincerely prayed together for world peace. In addition, a group was formed to visit China in 2000. In 2003, when the Pure Land Learning College held its grand opening, the IRO came and conveyed their best wishes. During the trips, all the religious representatives shared ideas and truly communicated, and thus became close friends.

In July 2004, an Indonesian interfaith delegation visited Cairo, Egypt and the Vatican. On that trip they met with the elders at Al Azhar University, an Islamic university that has a history of over one thousand years, and then Pope John Paul II.

In December of the same year, an Indonesian interfaith delegation, led by the former president of Indonesia, Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid, visited Chinese religious representatives. As the proverb says: “Read ten thousand books and travel ten thousand miles.” Being invited on these trips as advisor, I, too, benefited a great deal in the harmonious atmosphere of such various interfaith visits.

In October 2006, at the invitation of Dr. Preeyanuch Jariyavidyanont, Deputy Permanent Delegate of Thailand to UNESCO, the Pure Land Learning College co-hosted the three-day “Celebration of the 2550th Birth Anniversary of the Buddha” with UNESCO at its Paris headquarters. We sincerely invited representatives of the religions from Singapore and Australia to pray together for world peace on stage. With the lectures and an exhibition, we successfully proved three things to the delegates from the 192 countries in UNESCO and participants from all over the world.

Religious groups can indeed work together. There is only one True God in the universe. This True God is love.

One can indeed be taught to be a better person. In the township of Tangchi, Lujiang, China, the teachers at The Lujiang Centre of Cultural Education practiced and taught the Confucian Guidelines for Being a Good Person. These actions deeply moved the local residents. Within three months, good social values were restored significantly, which serves as proof [that one can indeed be taught to be a better person].

From this we can see that the teaching of traditional culture of the sages around the world can truly be applied to resolve contradiction and conflict and achieve world peace today.

In May 2008, I was invited to join a Malaysian religious delegation visiting Islamic groups in Xinjiang Province, China. We visited the Islamic Institute and amiably exchanged views with local Muslims. It was a rare opportunity in learning.

The aforementioned trips and visits greatly enhanced interfaith learning, communication, and understanding, and these generated very good results. Generally, religious leaders have limited contact with one another. Even when they meet occasionally, their time together is short. If they can travel together, they will be in one another’s company from morning till night and the best communication in every aspect will be achieved.

DELVING DEEPLY INTO RELIGIOUS TEACHING

For religious groups to get along harmoniously and to understand and help one another, the most important foundation is to understand the core teachings of every religion and to practice them. Therefore, it is indeed necessary for religious groups to learn one another's religious texts.

In Chinese etymology, religion, or Zongjiao, has profound meanings. Zong conveys the meaning of “fundamental,” “main,” and “revere.” Jiao is “education.” Therefore, Zongjiao means “a fundamental, main education; a teaching that is worth respecting and praising.”

Once an Indonesian practitioner asked me, “How can different religious groups get along harmoniously without conflict?”

I answered that the most important thing is to diligently learn one's own religious teaching. For example, Indonesia acknowledges five religions: Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. These five religions are like a person's five fingers. They differ in length, but when one traces them back to the palm, the wrist, and the arm, one will know that the fingers share the same root and the same origin. Therefore, as long as one continues to delve deeply into one's religious texts, when one gets to a certain level, one will naturally comprehend the teaching. When one is exposed to the texts of other religions, one will also be able to understand them. An ancient saying speaks of “delving deeply into one teaching and immersing oneself in it for a long time.” When one delves deeply and reaches a certain level, one will attain a pure mind and will naturally have a thorough understanding.

I feel that when different religious groups begin to interact with one another, they should seek common ground and put aside differences. They should especially point out the common teachings in the texts and put aside the teachings that are different. The teachings of the sages come from great minds, and great minds think alike. We see differences because our level of cultivation is not deep enough. If we continue to learn and delve deeply into our own teachings and elevate our level, we will naturally understand and all the differences will dissolve.

A proverb says: “Everyone shares the same heart. Since they share the same heart, they would think in a similar fashion.” Different religious groups will naturally be like brothers and sisters, respecting, loving, and working with one another.

For years, I have diligently learned various religious texts such as the Old and New Testaments and the Qur'an. When I study the Bible, I become a devout Christian or a devout Catholic. When I study the Qur'an, I become a devout Muslim. My sincerity and respect for Allah and God are pure and impartial, just like my sincerity and respect for Buddhas and bodhisattvas. I deeply understand that only when I completely put down the three obstacles of jealousy, anger, and greed and affirm that all sages are my best teachers will I benefit from studying the texts and really understand the true meanings of the sages' teachings.

TAKING UP THE MISSION OF PROPAGATING THE PROPER TEACHINGS

Today, the world is in chaos. The root reason is that Easterners neglect the teaching of the sages and Westerners neglect religious education. Take traditional Chinese teaching for example. The two most important subjects for children are the classics and history. Chinese classics are the basis of the teaching of the sages. History books are the accumulation of previous generations' experiences. If one does not study the classics, one will not grow in learning and virtue. If one does not study history, one will not be enriched in knowledge and experience. People today neglect the classics and history and abandon religion. They do not know that religious teaching and the teaching of the sages are about natural law. Or that truth, virtuousness, beauty, and wisdom are innate in the minds and nature of all beings. Therefore, they are at a loss; they do not know what to do. From individuals and families to society, countries, and even nature and the universe, enormous conflict arises and cannot be resolved.

At this critical moment, propagators of each religion, without a doubt, should take up the great mission of "reviving and passing on the teachings of the ancient sages and achieving everlasting peace for future generations" and fulfill the sacred aspiration of propagating and protecting the proper teachings and saving the world from pending disasters.

When we carefully look at history, it is easy for us to see that the teaching of every religion in the world is a perfect multicultural social teaching of the utmost virtuousness. The founders of all the religions were voluntary multicultural social educators. Jesus taught for three years. Muhammad taught for twenty-seven years. Confucius taught for five years. Sakyamuni Buddha taught for forty-nine years. They all completely let go of prestige, wealth, and greed. They were pure in mind and body. They engaged in cultivation and taught people from all walks of life, without

discrimination. Therefore, they were able to exert profound and wide-reaching influence on people of their times and later generations.

I sincerely hope that the United Nations or the government of each country will establish a university of religions to nurture good teachers of religions, who will delve deeply into their own religious teachings and learn from one another. The students will give lectures every day. After being assessed by a governmental review board as to whether it is truly beneficial to social stability and harmony, approved lectures can be broadcasted to people on national television and around the world via the Internet and satellite television for long-distance learning.

Important religious maxims can be extracted and compiled into books to enhance interfaith communication and understanding, truly affirming “One Humanity, Many Faiths.” Indeed, all of the cultures, all ethnic groups, and all learning are one entity.

This way, all the contradictions and conflicts will naturally be resolved. We can gladly expect a harmonious world. All beings will be happy.

I hope that everyone present today will share this great wish and have the same mind and the same aspiration. I sincerely hope that everyone here will courteously invite the Prime Minister of Australia, Mr. Kevin Rudd to be the first one to establish a global university of religions or a global multicultural university, so that Australia will lead the world to peace and stability and set the best example for other countries. This will be the true contribution that everyone present today makes to their countries and people and to the humanity.

In conclusion, I wish the summit every success! And I wish all of you good health! May the propagation of your teachings be truly successful!

I also wish Prime Minister, Mr. Kevin Rudd good health. May Australia continue to enjoy every prosperity.

Shí Chín Kung

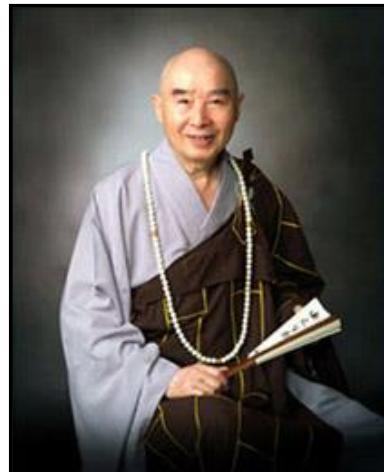
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Ven. Master Chin Kung

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Thus, I will like to express my undying gratitude and utmost admiration for the Ven. Master Chin Kung. He is the radiant sun of Dharma, for his teachings have illuminated the hearts of not only myself, but also the hearts of countless sentient beings across the boundless Dharma-realm. Where there was once ignorance and darkness, there is now light and hope ; where there was once suffering and vengeance, there is now the indescribable bliss of Infinite Life. It is without a shadow of doubt that the Buddha's rarest, highest and most profound teachings could be found in his every word, and even in his slightest expression.

If not for his generous, diligent and century spanning efforts in lecturing and promoting Pureland Buddhism, I would never have encountered the profound Dharma of Amitabha. Furthermore, even though he is now approaching his 90s, he still tirelessly lectures the Infinite Life Sutra for several hours everyday all year round. Thus, it is my sincere with that this modest work can be my small token of gratitude, to repay the Great Compassion and unconditional benevolence that he has shown to me and the world.

Namo Amitabha!
